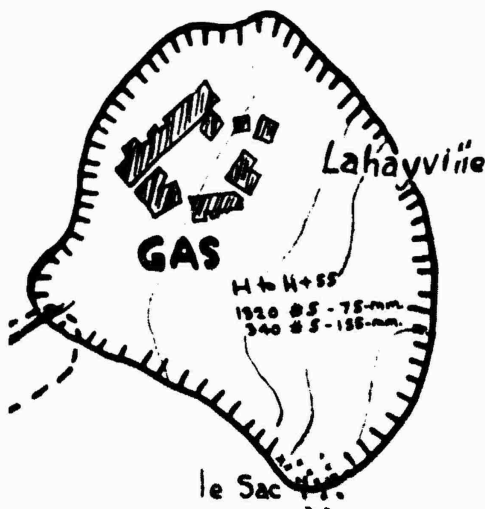


U. S. ARMY CHEMICAL CORPS HISTORICAL STUDIES
GAS WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I

THE 26th DIVISION EAST OF THE MEUSE

September 1918

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The 26th Division East of the Meuse

Prepared by

Rexmond C. Cochrane, Ph.D.

Under Contract DA-18-108-CML-6214

with

U.S. Army Chemical Corps

This is an accepted draft study on gas warfare in World War I

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Colonel, CmlC
Director for Military Operations

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The 26th Division East of the Meuse
October 1918

by

Rexmond C. Cochrane



GAS WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I

Study Number 20

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Foreword

This is a tentative study of the gas experience of the 26th Division East of the Meuse during World War I. This study is not presented as a definitive and official history, but is reproduced for current reference use within the Military Establishment pending the publication of an approved history.

The author was assisted in his research by Mrs. Charlotte M. Bolin and Mr. George H. Dengler.

Note to Reader: Comments and suggestions relative to accuracy and adequacy of treatment are invited, and may be transmitted to the Chief, U. S. Army Chemical Corps Historical Office, Army Chemical Center, Maryland.

THE 26TH DIVISION EAST OF THE MEUSE

October 1918

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THE 26th DIVISION EAST OF THE MEUSE

↙ No division in the AEF had so much sheer ill fortune as the 26th. Though praised by its French instructors as a splendid, battle-worthy outfit, superior to the 42nd and even the vaunted 1st Division, it found no favor with Pershing and his staff, possibly because it was a National Guard division and had an argumentative, independent-minded commander in General Edwards. The division was destined to spend more time in quiet sectors, and at greater cost, than any division in the AEF.

↘ Single-handedly, the 26th Division demonstrated almost every possible mistake that could be made in the use of gas. The French were generous and gave the division considerably gas ammunition, most of it odd lots of cyanic and lachrymatory shells that when fired served largely to provoke serious retaliation. In the one instance, for a raid on enemy trenches, when the division fired a sufficient quantity of phosgene to be effective, the gas swept down on the raiding troops and gassed every man. The 26th Division had the unhappy distinction of suffering the greatest number of gas casualties, most of them on quiet fronts, in the AEF.

The present study spans the career of the 26th Division in France, concentrating on the gas episodes that did so much to nullify the original splendid promise of the division.

Yankee Division

The 26th (Yankee) Division was activated on 22 August 1917 under the command of Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Edwards, who had seen service in the Philippines and had later been in command of the Panama Canal Zone. His Division was hastily organized from National Guard units throughout New England, assembled in seven cities in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Two weeks after activation, under War Department pressure to get token troops to France, the division was on its way overseas.

As it embarked, the division comprised of the 101st and 102nd Infantry, 51st Brigade, under Brig. Gen. Peter E. Traub; the 103rd and 104th Infantry, 52nd Brigade, under Brig. Gen. Charles H. Cole; the 51st FA Brigade under Brig. Gen. William L. Lassiter, and machine gun, engineer, signal, medical, and supply components. Hardly a single officer that sailed with the division, including its commander, was to return with it. Some were lost in combat, more to harassment by higher headquarters, but most were casualties of the hurried build-up of the American Army in France. In ten months overseas the 51st FA Brigade, for example, had six commanders, and regimental and battalion commanders in the infantry seem to have been replaced as often. It happened in other divisions, of course, but in none with more serious effects on esprit de corps than in the 26th.

By the end of October 1917 the units that had landed in England and France were collected near Neufchatgau in the Vosges and set to work constructing an AEF training center. They were in uniform, had rifles, and a

credit for six million dollars to buy the rest of their equipment and supplies, their trench artillery, machine guns, animal and motor transportation, ordnance, engineer, and signal equipment, additional clothing, and food.

While General Edwards toured the British front near Cambrai to learn "how they used gas, large calibers and barrages...made raids...[and every night gave the Germans] a bit of chemical barrage," his Engineers built barracks for the 42nd Division, then on the high seas, his quartermaster staff scrounged trucks from the French and toured Paris, Nancy, and Toul buying up supplies and material, and the rest of the division, when it wasn't on work details, began training and attending the infantry specialty schools of the AEF recently established at Gondrecourt and Langres.¹

Gas training was not begun until 10 December when a shipment of 25,000 small box respirators (SBR) and 6,000 M-2 masks was received and distributed. With its handful of qualified gas officers, the division trained the men a battalion at a time. In mid-February an inspector from the Gas Service found gas defense training inadequate and neglected, and the next month Capt. Thomas A. Cutler came in as Division Gas Officer, replacing 2nd Lt. Bowman. Still it was late May 1918 before all units completed the testing of their masks in the gas chamber.²

1

Harry A. Benwell, History of the Yankee Division (Boston: Cornhill, 1919), pp. 33 - 7.

2

Ltr, 2nd Lt I. J. Bowman. DGO 26th Div to C of Gas Serv, 13 Dec 1917, sub: Rpt; Ltr, C of Gas Serv to CofS AEF, 17 Feb, sub: Condition of gas defense in 26th Div (AEF GHQ G - 3 Rpts Box 3192, fol 1567); Ltr, Capt Cutler DGO 26th Div to G - 1 XXXII Fr Corps, 31 May, sub: Gas Chamber (both in 26th Div Box 249, fol 3).

In January 1918, on Petain's urgent plea to Pershing, the preliminary training of the division was cut short and it was assigned to de Maud'huy's XI French Corps (Duchesne's Sixth Army) on the Chemin des Dames front, north of the Aisne. At frightful cost the French under Nivelle had taken the Chemin des Dames from the Germans the previous October. Out of sheer exhaustion and depletion on both sides it had been a quiet sector since that time but seriously undermanned on the French side.

So thin were the French ranks that on arrival the twelve battalions of the 26th Division were spread across a 30-kilometer front. As companies took over the French coups de combats positions -- groups of 20 to 40 men with two or more machine guns each in knee-deep trenches -- on the north of the Chemin des Dames plateau, the balance of their battalions occupied the great quarries or caves along the edge of the crown of the Chemin des Dames.³

The division went into the Aisne line on 6 February and remained until 20 March, making occasional raids with their French instructors, learning trench warfare routine, but offering no more provocation to the enemy than the French permitted. French headquarters spoke glowingly of the training and readiness of the 26th Division troops, saying they had made "very much better progress" than the 42nd Division and were "almost better" than the 1st

3

FO 1, 26th Div, 3 Feb (26th Div Box 13, 32.1); Benwell, pp. 60 - 1.

Division.⁴ To de Maud'huy, their only fault was that they were "too much prepared for attack," rather than for trench life.⁵

In the six weeks in the caves, a historian reported, the division suffered "very few casualties and [had] but twelve men...evacuated with gas poisoning."⁶ His subsequent memory of another 250 gas cases still fell far short of the probable true total.

Following one flurry of gas shells, the 104th Infantry aid station was swamped. Lieutenant Bowman, then Division Gas Officer, admitted that the dugouts and caves in the sector offered little protection against gas, but the men were largely at fault for not wearing their masks at the alert position. All had smelled the gas before they could mask and were therefore certain they were casualties. The regimental medical officer who saw the men said they "were suffering from suggestion rather than from the effects of enemy gas shells....In spite of large numbers who reported, not one man showed any sign of gas intoxication after his mental anxiety had been allayed." All were returned to duty the next day.⁷

Shortly before the relief of the division the Germans put over a gas bombardment that was said to have lasted thirty-six hours. In a

⁵ Ltr, CG XI Fr Corps to CG 26th Div, 11 Feb (26th Div Box 192, 320).

⁶ Benwell, p. 54.

⁷ Ltr, DGO 26th Div to CG 26th Div, 10 Mar, sub: Rpt of Inspection; 1st Ind., MO 104th Inf to CO 104th Inf, 17 Mar; 5th Ind., CO 104th Inf to CG 26th Div, 19 Mar (26th Div Box 249, fol 5).

splendid contradiction, an historian of the event said that "the gas discipline was so good the division had only 250 casualties."⁸ This may have been the fifth gas attack reported by Spencer -- the four in February and early March accounted for 7 gas casualties -- when approximately 15,000 phosgene, diphosgene, chlorine, mustard gas, and xylyl bromide (tear gas) shells were said to have fallen during the night of 16 March along a front held by the French that included a battalion of the 102nd Infantry. Failure to recognize the nature of the bombardment and delay in masking resulted, said the Regimental Gas Officer, in at least 155 casualties in the 102nd and over 100 -- an entire company -- among the French.⁹

Divisional records of casualties -- indeed of anything -- in the Chemin des Dames sector are meager but Medical Department records indicate over 100 killed and wounded and almost 500 gas casualties in March, 446 of the gas cases in the 102nd Infantry. That more is not known of this attack may be owing to the fact that "the evacuation of wounded [and gas-se] to the rear [in this sector] was not entirely satisfactory. Some wounded were evacuated without the knowledge of the medical officers because they were sent directly through the French [aid] stations and all the reports went to the French authorities, who did not inform us."¹⁰

8

Benwell, p. 62.

9

Ltr, RGO and Regtl Surg, 102nd Inf to CO 102nd Inf, 19 Mar, sub: Gas Casualties, with atchd docs (26th Div Box 44, 33.6); Spencer, "History of Gas Attacks upon the AEF" (15 Feb 1928), II, 189 - 95.

10

Analysis, p. 65. Ltr, Regt Surg 101st Inf to Div Surg 26th Div, 28 Mar, sub: Prelim rpt in accord with Circ Ltr 56 (26th Div Box 40, 43.8).

Upon its relief in the Aisne sector, the division was on its way to an AEF training area, carrying out maneuvers on the march, when it was deflected as a result of the great German offensive on 21 March against the French and British at the Somme. It was sent to the Toul area, below Verdun, to relieve a French division and the American 1st Division in Passaga's XXXII Corps, releasing both for the ruptured battlefront to the north.¹¹

After some confusion in orders and relief procedures -- the division's orders were changed nine times before it settled in the Toul sector -- on the morning of 1 April the 26th Division completed the relief of the 1st Division brigade and its adjacent French unit along a 15-kilometer front from Aprement to Flirey. Though 1st Division records said the relief was carried out while a gas bombardment of the sector was in progress, the 26th Division reported no gas attack and no casualties. There were at least 60 gas casualties among the departing 1st Division troops, and at least one man of the 26th was seen gassed. He had no mask.¹²

As finally disposed, the 104th Infantry covered the front before Aprement, the 103rd held the Xivray front, the 101st was deployed above Rambucourt, and the 102nd covered Seichprey and the Bois de Remieres (Map No. 1). Facing the 26th Division in the trenches at the foot of the Meuse plain was the 5th Landwehr Division of Group Mihiel, its main

II
FO 2, 26th Div, 8 Mar; FO 13, 1900, 29 Mar; FO 15, 2200, 31 Mar.

12

See Study No. 9, "The 1st Division at Ansauville," pp. 45 - 6.

forces on Mont Sec and the heights of the Meuse. This German unit came into the Woëvre - C^otes de Meuse sector in September 1914 and was still there in September 1918, when it was driven north during the St. Mihiel attack.¹³

Except for daily HE fire averaging 500 shells, with a few gas rounds mixed in, and all of it seemingly scheduled at mealtime, the sector was reported as fairly quiet for several weeks. Nevertheless, the Germans from their superior positions created a diversion at least once a week, either bombarding one or more of the towns in the 26th Division sector or making a minor raid on the outposts.¹⁴ French orders kept large numbers of men in these sacrifice positions in front of the trenches and denied reinforcements to them in the event of an attack. They made inviting targets.

In the third week, though the division received warnings that a major enemy raid was brewing, when it came it had all the force and effectiveness of a surprise attack. Maj. George J. Rau's 1st Battalion, 102nd Infantry, was relieving the 3rd Battalion on the night of 19 - 20 April when the preparatory bombardment began.

"The Seicheprey affair"

The enemy bombardment began at 0300 on 20 April and shortly after dawn, under cover of a heavy mist, a German force of about 1,800, a special

¹³

Histories of 251 Divisions of the German Army (Washington: GPO, 1920), pp. 118 - 19.

¹⁴

Cf. Memo (asked for by C-in-C), Col Fox Connor G - 3 AEF for CofS AEF, 16 Spr, sub: 26th Div Affair of Apr 12th (26th Div Box 25, 33.6), concerning poor disc in 104th Inf during an enemy raid on Bois Brule. See msgs, 104th Inf, 13 Apr (26th Div Box 50, 32.16).

storm battalion of two companies leading the way, fell upon Company C of the 102nd Infantry settling into the trenches before Seicheprey and after a short, vicious fight captured practically the whole unit.

The success of the raid KIRSCHBLÜTE ("Cherry Blossom") surprised even the Germans themselves, who had intended it only "to keep the enemy forces in check" by destroying their strong point at Seicheprey.¹⁵ The 26th Division was never to live down this episode, though explanations and defenses continued to be made into the 1920's.

General Edwards insisted that the capture of the company could not have been avoided since they "had definite orders that their mission was warning and sacrifice...[and] resistance to the last was demanded." He did not say they had been taken by surprise. They were, even though the division had been warned just the week before by the French that the 14th Stosstruppe (storm battalion) was then "at Heudicourt training for a powerful raid," and this fact was confirmed before the raid occurred by artillery intelligence.¹⁶

Edwards was later quoted as saying that 1,300 Germans attacked at Seicheprey and another 1,500 in the Bois de Remieres, and in the fog overran the forward machine gun positions of the 102nd and swept through Seiche-

15

Order Ia 929, 78th Res Div, 18 Apr, sub: Cherry Blossom (app. to 40 - page War Files Extracts, 78th Res Div, German Files Box 202).

16

G - 3 Memo 1844/31, Staff of Passaga for staff at Boucq, 13 Apr (26th Div Box 12, 22.7); Opns Rpt 13, 51st FA Brig, 17 Apr (26th Div Box 59, 33.6).

prey. In the 36-hour fire fight (or period of near panic) that followed he claimed over 1,200 German casualties, including, dramatically enough, "over 400 Boche helmets on the ground."¹⁷ German casualties, according to a French observer, were estimated at 275, including 125 killed. The Germans themselves reported losses of 361, including 75 killed and one artilleryman gassed.¹⁸

Apart from gas officer reports, none of the many accounts of the Seicheprey affair mention that the hour and a half bombardment preceding the raid consisted wholly of gas. (Hence the gassed German artilleryman.) German records show that the reenforced artillery of the 78th Reserve Division, totaling 55 batteries, fired over 20,700 77-mm., 105-mm., 150-mm., and 10-cm. blue and green cross shells (diphenylchloroarsine and phosgene) and 900 10-cm. yellow cross shells (mustard gas) on the front from Xivray to Remieres Wood east. Most of it was concentrated on 32 French and American batteries that the Germans had located back of the front, around Rambucourt, Beaumont, Bois de la Hazelle, Voisogne, and Lironville. Some part of the gas was fired during and after the raid, to maintain the gas screen, along with 42,000 HE shells and 6,000 trench

¹⁷

Benwell, p. 74; Ltr, CG 26th Div to CG I Corps, 11 May, sub: Rpt on atk, Apr 20 - 21; Ltr, Col John H. Parker (CO 102nd Inf) to Editor, Infantry Journal, 20 Feb 1920; Memo, G - 3 26th Div to CofS 26th Div, 17 Apr 1920, sub: Notes on Seicheprey Raid (all in 26th Div Box 25, 33.6, 33.7).

¹⁸

Rpt, Fr Mil Mission atchd to 26th Div to CG 26th Div, 9 May, sub: Sum of Intel in regard to Enemy - Seicheprey affair (26th Div Box 25, 33.6); War Files Extracts, 78th Res Div, above.

mortar shells.¹⁹

Regimental gas officers estimated that the bombardment comprised between 4,000 and 5,000 gas shells, all calibers, the "small amount of high explosive" mixed with the gas obviously that in the blue cross shells. Casualties were said to be 98 gassed in the infantry and 139 artillerymen, or 237. The gas fire and the HE bombardment that began as the raiders advanced and continued through the day destroyed all communications in the sector, smashing artillery liaison and causing the infantry units to lose all track of each other. Almost every battery position had to be temporarily evacuated.²⁰ Hard hit by the HE fire were the battalions of the 101st, 102nd, and 104th Infantry and the company of Engineers that came up to Seicheprey later that morning to repel the raiders.

Debouching from their trenches opposite Seicheprey, the raiders rushed Sybille Trench in front of the town, enveloped and briefly occupied the town itself, destroying all its dugouts and defenses, and then withdrew to the trench. They had captured most of Company C, ten heavy and fifteen light machine guns, and destroyed ten more, in a fight that lasted little more than an hour. Back in Sybille Trench the German force waited out the

19

Hanslian, "Gasangriffe an der Amerikanischen Front" (CMLHO), PP. 113 - 14; Opns Rpt 318, Arko 78, 23 Apr (War Files Extracts, above, pp. 35 - 40).

20

Ltr, RGO 102nd Inf to DGO 26th Div, 22 Apr, sub: Gas Casualties... atk of Apr 20 (26th Div Box 249, fol 7); Frank P. Sibley, With the Yankee Division in France (Boston: Little, Brown, 1919), p. 151; Spencer, II, 197 - 201. See also collection of 102nd Inf unit rpts in 26th Div Box 44, 33.6.

the expected counterbombardment and counterattack, with orders to return to their own lines after dark.²¹

Sometime before noon Major Rau reached Seicheprey with the reserve battalion of the 102nd, found it evacuated, and advanced on the raiders in Sybille Trench. As his troops approached the trench, the guns of the 69th French and 26th Divisions that had been manned again after the gas attack opened fire on the trench and town, driving Major Rau's forces back to cover in Seicheprey. The shelling of the town continued for over four hours before it could be stopped. Six men were wounded and two machine guns were smashed by this fire.²² Something very like panic, beginning with the gas bombardment and maintained by the enemy's heavy HE fire, seems to have prevailed throughout the sector all that day. The enemy raiders remained unmolested in the protection of Sybille Trench.

A second counterattack, ordered by the French corps at daylight on 21 April, with six companies of the 51st Brigade under Major John J. Gallant and two companies of the 69th French never got launched. When one of the companies failed to arrive at the hour for the attack, Major Gallant, on his own initiative, called it off.²³

²¹ A 26th Div map of the atk is in 26th Div Box 23, 32.1, and the German map of the atk, with rpt of the opn, in GFB 202.

²² Msg, Rau to Parker CO 102nd, 1450, 20 Apr, quoted in Ltr, CG 26th Div, 11 May, above; Ltr, Div Insp to CG 26th Div, 10 May, sub: Arty fire in Seicheprey, Apr 20 (26th Div Box 25, 33.6). See also rpts in 26th Div Box 45, 39.

²³ FO 24a, 26th Div, 1500, 20 Apr, ordered the atk; Hist of the 102nd Inf, n.d., p. 14 (26th Div Box 41, 11.4); Sibley, pp. 146 - 47.

As it happened, the enemy had withdrawn completely from the area the previous night, but patrols had failed to find this out. About 1100 hours on 21 April the old positions were reoccupied and the killed and wounded there evacuated. The rest of the day was spent preparing court-martial charges against Major Gallant, counting casualties, and reorganizing the 102nd Infantry. "At first on that Sunday morning it was thought that whole companies had been utterly wiped out. But detachment after detachment turned up, and in the end the total loss was found to be really very low."²⁴

How low casualties were seems to have been more a matter of opinion than of count. Figures for the gas and HE bombardment, the raid, and the fight on the 20th range all the way from 270 to a total of 914. General Edwards in his final report to I Corps said the killed, seriously wounded, seriously gassed, and missing did not exceed 270. G - 3 at the time reported 21 killed, 138 wounded, 94 gassed, 33 shell-shocked, and 209 captured, for a total of 493.²⁵

Sibley, in his history of the division, said 80 were killed and 554 were wounded, gassed, and captured, or 634. Pershing's note of the affair

24

Sibley, p. 148. Memo, Div Adj for CofS 26th Div, 20 May, n.s. (26th Div Box 222, 704), indicates that a month later 37 members of the 102nd, including an officer, were rptd for the first time as missing in that action. Cf. 1st Ind, Div Adj to CRO TAG, 14 Jun, same file.

25

Ltr, CG 26th Div, 11 May, above; DOR, 26th Div, 20 - 22 Apr (26th Div Box 23, 32.1). Gen Edwards' first 20-page account, Rpt of Enemy Raid..., 23 Apr (26th Div Box 25, 33.8), said 58 were killed, 145 wounded, and 226 captured, or 429, with no mention of gas casualties.

in his memoirs said the raid cost 81 killed, 187 wounded, 214 gassed, and 5 officers and 182 men captured, a total of 669. The largest total, 914, was attributed to General Edwards by another division historian who quoted him as saying that 164 officers and men were killed in the fray, 600 gassed and wounded, and 150 captured that day.²⁶

The Regimental Gas Officer count of 237 gas casualties in the infantry and artillery during the raid is not supported by Medical Department statistics, which indicate that only 49 of the 184 gas cases that month occurred on 20 - 21 April, with none in the artillery.²⁷ A hospital count of casualties is not possible since hospital admission lists for that period are missing in the records. It seems fairly certain however that the raid cost well over 600 casualties, including over 200 gas casualties and precisely 5 officers and 178 men captured.²⁸

"The taking of these prisoners," said an AEF historian, "put the American Army in a rather unfavorable light at the time, and the Germansmade the most of it. Through neutral countries, dropped by airplane went long accounts with pictures of this affair; and the wireless station near Berlin told all the world about it in boastful terms."²⁹

26

Sibley, p. 139; Pershing, My Experiences in the World War (New York, 1931), II, p. 16; Benwell, p. 74.

27

Analysis, p. 65. The same source shows 65 killed and 94 wounded in the 102nd Inf on 20 - 21 Apr.

28

War Files Extracts, 78th Res Div, above; Mil Attache Rpt 2842, 20 Jan 1922, sub: Atk on Seicheprey (26th Div Box 12, 22.7).

29

Shipley Thomas, The History of the A.E.F. (New York: Doran, 1920), pp. 72 - 3. Thomas suggests that the 1st Div atk at Cantigny on 28 May was made to vindicate the name of the American Army.

After several hectic days, life in the sector returned to its normal nerve-wracking routine. G - 2 reported over 30,000 HE shells, 3,100 gas, and 1,050 mixed gas and HE in April, exclusive of the 20 April bombardments, over two-thirds of this fire in the first half of the month. Since G - 3 apparently issued no daily reports until 13 April, its casualty count for April of 83 killed, 234 wounded, 100 gassed, 31 shell shocked, and 209 captured, or 657, is inadequate. More accurate may be Medical Department statistics for April showing 146 killed, 328 wounded, and 184 gassed. With the 183 captured at Seicheprey, total casualties came to 841.³⁰

"This is the first time....."

Through most of May fewer than 300 enemy shells a day fell in the division sector and as in the latter part of April, G - 3 reported more accidental injuries than shell casualties. Shell fire resulted in a total of 19 killed, 73 wounded, 48 gassed, and 4 shell shocked, according to G - 3 daily reports. Two more were killed and 9 wounded on patrols.³¹ An enemy gas projector attack and a gas bombardment by the division's own artillery were to cost the 26th Division an additional 459 gas casualties.

Although the division had been warned of projector attacks in the Toul sector, and its observers and reconnaissance aircraft had kept a close watch for telltale signs, the attack came with complete and stunning

³⁰

SOI 1 - 29, 26th Div, 2 - 30 Apr (26th Div Box 8, 20.1); DOR, 26th Div, 13 - 30 Apr; Analysis, p. 65.

³¹

DOR, 26th Div, 1 - 30 May; SOI 30 - 60, 1 - 31 May, reported 10,105 HE, 339 gas, and 300 mixed gas and HE shells.

surprise. At 0115 hours on 10 May, in heavy fog, 1,141 18-cm. projector bombs containing over 20 tons of phosgene exploded on the south slope of Hill 322, woods of Aprémont, and the trenches in the vicinity occupied by Company D of the 103rd Infantry and its machine gun unit. Six men died within five minutes, 17 succumbed later in the day, and 162 were evacuated as serious hospital cases. The remains of the company were relieved that night.

"This is the first time," a staff report of the AEF Gas Service was to say, "that an attack of this kind has been made upon a high position, and no warning of the attack had been given by Intelligence officers.... On the whole, owing to the unusual character of the attack, the number of casualties can hardly be attributed to poor discipline."³²

The speed with which the German pioneers set up this operation and executed it made it almost impossible to detect in time. The projectors, German records show, were brought into the sector two days before, emplaced northwest of Aprémont the next night, and fired before the division even learned of their existence.³³

32

Ltr, Maj G. N. Lewis, Actg C Def Div, Gas Serv to Lt Col J. N. W. Schulz, Gas Serv Repres, G - 4 GHQ AEF, 20 May, sub: Recent Gas Atks (26th Div Box 249, fol 1).

33

Hanslian, pp. 17 - 26. Col John L. Miles' account of this atk ("Could It Happen to You?" Army, Aug 1957, pp. 41 - 3) stresses the warnings the division had of projector attacks in the sector and suggests that the last aerial photos that were taken, on 4 May, might possibly have shown the emplacements. The German account would deny this. See also Spencer, II, 202 - 06, used by Miles.

G - 3 reported at first that the attack had occurred at 0525 and was in retaliation for diversionary fire put down by the division artillery to cover a raid of the 10th Colonial, on the left. The next day the sequence of events was corrected: the projector attack, an operation of enemy pioneer troops working along the Woivre front, had occurred at 0115, followed by a half hour of minenwerfer and artillery fire back of the gassed area. The 26th Division fire had begun as scheduled about 0500, and in retaliation for that, enemy artillery opened up with gas and HE fire at 0525. This latter fire, said G - 3, killed 10 men and wounded 12. The gas casualty count of 177 did not distinguish between the projector attack and the later gas fire.³⁴

The Regimental Gas Officer of the 103rd Infantry thought no more than 300 projectiles had been fired. Panicking in the sudden cloud of gas that engulfed them -- eight seconds elapsed between the characteristic flash at the emplacement site and the explosion on the slope -- "three or four men went out of their heads and would not put on masks, and knocked off the masks of others." Effects of the cloud were felt downwind in the areas of eight other companies, and several there by their exertions while preparing to repel the attack they expected to follow became casualties later in the day.

The Division Gas Officer estimated 600 18-cm. projectiles in the attack, and thought they had been fired from the west edge of Bois Jura, about

34

DOR, 26th Div, 9 - 11 May; Ltrs, CG 52nd Brig to CG 26th Div, 10 May, sub: Special situation rpt No. 2....No. 4 (26th Div Box 37, 33.6). Rpts No. 1 and 3 have not been found.

600 meters from the target area. He confirmed the final total of 185 casualties, including an unspecified number in Company B in St. Agnant, a kilometer back of Hill 322. Most of the men, he said, had changed from their SBR to their M-2 mask sometime after the attack and almost all had aggravated their condition by their exertions at the scene or in walking to the aid station, a mile away.³⁵

"This sad affair"

Early in May preparations began for the first large-scale raid made by the division. Maj. James F. Hickey with 300 of his 101st Infantry battalion began intensive training far in the rear. With detachments of the 102nd and 103rd Machine Gun Battalions, special signal and engineer sections, and two squadrons of planes flying cover, he was to jump off just west of Seicheprey and attack the enemy's Camp du Moulin, northeast of Richecourt, collecting prisoners and materiel and squaring the Seicheprey score.

Although no gas was called for in the infantry plan or order for the raid,³⁶ 51st Brigade headquarters apparently asked for gas to the immediate right and left of the box barrage that was to be put around Camp

³⁵

Ltr, DGO to C of Gas Serv, 12 May, sub: Rpt of Gas Atk (26th Div Box 248); Rpt on Gas Atk, RGO 103rd Inf, n.d.; Rpt on Gas Atk, DGO 26th Div, n.d.; Suppl Rpt on Gas Atk, RGO 103rd Inf, n.d.; Ltr, RGO 101st Eng to DGO, 11 May, sub: Gas Atk night of May 7-10, rptd an engineer gassed in a working party near the impact area. All rpts in 26th Div Box 249, fol 7).

³⁶

See plans for raid dated 7 and 21 May (26th Div Box 40, 33.8), and FO 38, 26th Div, 1800, 28 May.

du Moulin. This was too near the point of attack, the artillery commander, General Aultman said, but gas would be used to neutralize enemy machine guns and minenwerfer east of the camp, from Lahayville to Le Sac.³⁷ Subsequent evidence suggests either that Colonel Logan, commander of the 101st Infantry, and Major Hickey were not informed of the gas plan or that no one believed that gas on Lahayville could possibly cause casualties at Camp du Moulin.

The HE bombardment of the German positions began at 2300 hours on 30 May and at 0230 the raiders advanced behind a rolling barrage. As they reached the first line of German trenches their artillery poured phosphorus into Lahayville, a village on slightly higher ground about three-quarters of a mile above Richecourt. The gas flowed down from Lahayville and engulfed the raiders. Unaware that it was gas or unwilling to admit it, Major Hickey was to say in his report that "the men were bothered considerably by the fumes from our shells, many men being rendered very sick, vomiting and gasping."³⁸

In the brief passage in the German trenches and camp some 40 Germans may have been killed, mostly by the engineers who bombed every enemy dug-

37

Ltr, CG 51st FA Brig to CG 51st Brig, 23 May, sub: Plan of Raid; 51st FA Brig, Plan of employment for Coup de Main east of Richecourt, 28 May (both in 26th Div Box 59, 33.8). Note: Opns Rpt 58, 51st FA Brig, 31 May (ibid., 33.6) did not rpt any gas fired that day.

38

Rpt of raid by 3rd Bn, 101st Inf, n.d. (26th Div Box 40, 33.8).

out they came to. Few live Germans were seen since the enemy, warned of the raid by the bombardment, had withdrawn most of his forces to the rear. The raiders found little use for the stout clubs they had been issued, and returned with a single prisoner, a mere boy, and several machine guns. Except for two men killed by their own grenades and fourteen wounded by enemy shell fire, the raiders returned safely about an hour after jumping off.³⁹

By noon that day nearly every man in the party began to show signs of having been more or less seriously gassed. Early reports of the raid glossed the gas incident. G - 3 said only that "gas shells were intensively used during the whole of the operation," without saying who used them, and reported 2 killed, 17 wounded, 2 shell shocked, and 39 very slightly gassed, all "due to the action in our raid." The next day another 170 gas cases were accounted for by G - 3 and on 6 June a final 25, for a total of 234.⁴⁰

The Division Gas Officer's first report was equally vague, saying that an unknown number of gas shells had resulted in 209 casualties in the 101st Infantry, 103rd MG Battalion, and Engineer detachment. The men had "run into the gas, smelling of new mown hay and ammonia, between

³⁹

Sibley, pp. 169 - 76.

⁴⁰

Rpt of Gas Bombardment, 31 May (26th Div Box 249, fol 4). Cf Ltrs, Med Off, 101st Inf to Div Surg 26th Div, 31 May and 2 Jun, sub: Rpts on Raid (26th Div Box 40, 43.8).

Lahayville and Richecourt," the powder smoke of the artillery fire concealing the gas sufficiently so that apparently none had masked.⁴¹

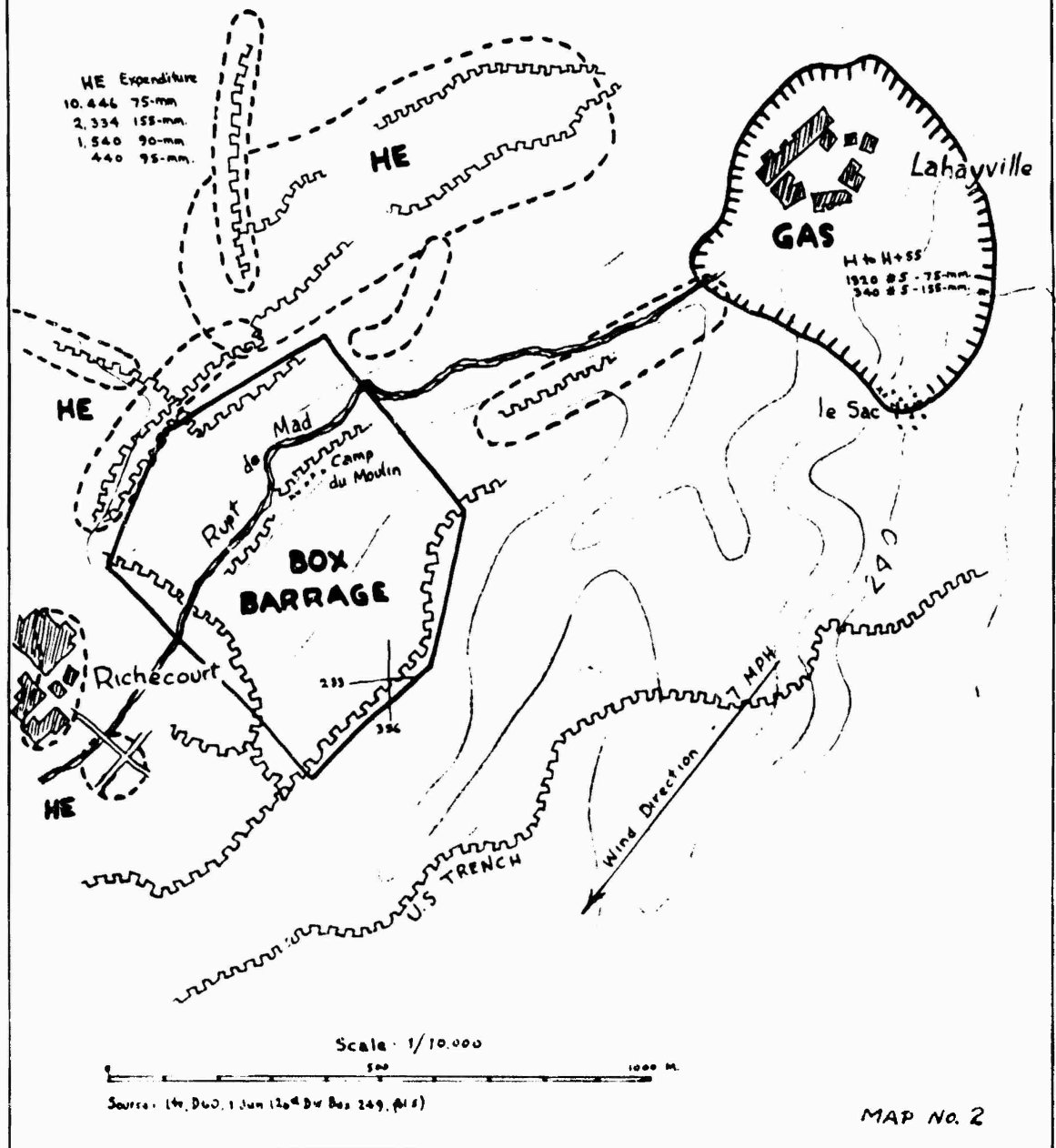
Captain Cutler's report and map sent the next day to General Edwards was more specific (Map No. 2). Without consulting him the artillery had fired 1,660 75-mm. and 155-mm. No. 5 phosgene shells into the Lahayville area, the gassed area about 600 meters from the edge of the box barrage area under attack. "This sad affair," he said, resulted from choosing a target without watching wind direction and velocity. A seven mile per hour wind from the northeast had swept the gas down on Richecourt, exposing the men to the vapor for the 30 to 45 minutes of the action. On their return they had hiked almost four miles back to their trucks at Mandres for the trip to the rear.

By evening all in the raiding party had been hospitalized and 209 of them showed signs of fairly severe phosgene poisoning. Five days later 231 men had been evacuated to base hospitals and the remainder of the party was still sick in quarters. Over the next two weeks, five died in the hospital. The rest, said the Division Surgeon, seemed to be on the road to recovery. The leader of the raiders, Major Hickey, after more than a month in the gas hospital, came out only to be "tossed by a shell

41

Rpt of Gas Bombardment, 31 May (26th Div Box 249, fol 4). Cf. Ltrs, Med Off, 101st Inf to Div Surg 26th Div, 31 May and 2 Jun, sub: Rpts on Raid (26th Div Box 40, 43.8).

GAS FOR RAID ON CAMP DU MOULIN 31 MAY 1918



shortly after his return," and had to be invalided out of the division.⁴²

The attempt to hush up the incident is clear from Colonel Logan's query to General Edwards on 4 June: "There is a belief prevalent that the gas from which these men have suffered came from shells fired by our own artillery." He asked for an investigation. Two days later General Edwards replied. He admitted that the artillery program for the raid "was silent on the question of gas," but "heard that the infantry had asked for gas on the back areas, and even in Richecourt, which was denied." However, gas had been put on Lahayville, in the belief, as he understood it, "that a 600 meter danger zone in the direction of the wind was all that had to be seriously considered, and that gas would not penetrate a high-explosive barrage."

It is a great lesson....It is one of those instances in this war where, after everything is taken into consideration, I do not see that any person or persons can be held distinctively culpable to such an extent that punitive measures in this great emergency would be wise or necessary. Brigadier General Aultman [51st FA Brigade commander, who had replaced General Lassiter three weeks before] comes to the same conclusion as I do, and it has given him the greatest regret and concern. Thank the Lord the serious casualties were few, and the others were slight.

I believe the error should be frankly confessed and admitted among ourselves, that it should go no farther, that advantage should be taken of the seriously learned lesson, that it is water that has run under the bridge that cannot be returned, and we should make the best of it in the spirit of self-sacrifice and charity that prevails as one of the controlling

42

Ltr, DGO to CG 26th Div, 1 Jun, sub: Gas Casualties on Raid of 101st Inf (26th Div Box 249, fol 5); Ltr, CO 101st Inf to CG 26th Div, 4 Jun, sub: Gassing of 101st Inf (26th Div Box 31, 63.1); Ltr, Div Surg 26th Div to Dir, Service de Sante, XXXII Corps, 14 Jun, sub: Rpt on Gas Atk, May 31 (Med Dept Box 3586, fol 19); Sibley, p. 198; Spencer, II, 211, who rpts 236 casualties.

spirits of this division, and the incident should be closed.⁴³

Aultman himself "confessed" that the gas order had been drafted in his office. In putting gas on Lahayville he had followed French doctrine as republished for the AEF, and the XXXII French Corps artillery commander had approved the plan as fired. The doctrine, he said, was obviously defective.⁴⁴

The error was alluded to, but no more, in the Gas Service Weekly Summary of Information on 5 June, under the heading, "Travel of Gas." But the incident, as might be expected, was soon well known throughout the AEF, and was to strengthen the natural reluctance of commanders to use gas, particularly in an offensive operation.⁴⁵

The 1st Gas Regiment Fires a Mission

After a week of investigation by the Office of the Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service, the Corps Gas Officer, French corps headquarters, the Medical Director of the Chemical Warfare Service, and General Aultman,

⁴³ Ltr, CO 101st Inf to CG 26th Div, 4 Jun, sub: Gassing of 101st Inf, May 31st, and 1st Ind to CO 101st Inf, 6 Jun (26th Div Box 31, 63.1).

⁴⁴ Memo, Lt Popp Asst CGO I Corps for Capt Goss, 6 Jun, sub: Suppl Info on Gas Casualties in Raiding Party (GAF - 26th Div); Ltr, CG 51st FA Brig to CG 26th Div, 19 Jun, sub: Gas Poisoning (26th Div Box 59, 63).

⁴⁵ CWS WSI S - 19, 5 Jun (WD Hist Box 298). Ltr, McAndrew Off of CofS GHQ AEF to CofS I Corps, 12 Jun, sub: Dangerous Use of Gas (2nd Div Box 106, 470.72), said more intelligent study of the use of gas and closer liaison between gas officers and their commanders was indicated.

51st Field Artillery Brigade commander, General Aultman and General Edwards came to a mutual understanding and "the unfortunate incident" was closed. A month later the French ordered a change in their artillery manuals, increasing the margin of safety from 500 to 2,000 meters when wind and terrain were unfavorable and requiring the wearing of masks under these conditions.⁴⁶

The month of June in the Toul sector saw an acceleration of activity on both sides, with G - 3 reporting 50 officers and men killed, 256 wounded, and 180 gassed, a total of 486. Spencer reports nine gas attacks that month, resulting in just 18 gas casualties. Medical Department statistics, on the other hand, reveal a total of 63 killed, 339 wounded, and 531 gassed in June. The latter figures include 245 gassed in the 101st Infantry, 92 in the 102nd, and 120 in the 103rd, although nothing in the division records supports so high a gas casualty total.⁴⁷ Nothing, that is, but G - 3's repeated reports of "good many gas shells used," "considerable percentage of gas shells," and "gas again used extensively," with just 180 gas casualties to support these remarks. The 26th Division, with much less access to gas than the enemy, replied as often as it could, once "in considerable quantities in areas where the long - range gun [that regularly

⁴⁶

Spencer, II, 214; G - 3 Memo, Armies of the North and Northeast for the Armies, 3 July, transmitted to C of Gas Serv AEF, 10 Jul (AEF GHQ G - 3 Rpts Bcx 3193, fol 1583).

⁴⁷

DOR, 26th Div, 1 - 27 Jun; Spencer, II, 218 - 27; Analysis, p. 65. SOI 61 - 86, 1 - 27 Jun, reveal a minimum of 24,000 HE and 3,500 gas shells fired into the sector.

shelled division headquarters at Boucq] was suspected to be." The gun was not silenced until the 19th following an HE bombardment of Heudicourt.⁴⁸

"Probably the most interesting event during the 26th's occupation of the Toul sector," said a historian, was the gas projector attack carried out by a company of the 1st Gas Regiment on the second line of enemy trenches running through Sonnard woods on the morning of 19 June. It was also the largest shoot ever carried out by the regiment on an American front. The gas and flame troops of the AEF were destined to be a highly trained but little used adjunct of the infantry.

The first two companies of the 1st Gas Regiment, organized in the States, had reached France in January 1918. After training with the Special Brigade of British gas troops up on the Ypres-Lens front during March and April, assisting them in a number of large-scale cylinder, Livens projector, and Stokes mortar operations, the companies were brought down and attached to French and American units in the line. In late May Company A was attached to the 26th Division at Toul, Company B to a nearby French unit. The company waited on weather and opportunity.

At 0230 hours on 19 June, in the largest independent gas shoot ever to be carried out by the 1st Gas Regiment on an American front, Company A fired 737 phosgene-filled projector drums from the Bois du

Jury on two targets in the Bois de la Sonnard, where enemy troops were believed holding in considerable force (see Map No. 1). Ten minutes after the discharge 26th Division artillery opened fire to hold down retaliation fire, only to be outgunned by the Germans who for two hours poured an estimated 9,000 gas and HE shells into the projector area, gun positions, and as far back as Boucq. G - 3 reported 7 killed, 28 wounded, and 85 gassed as a result of this fire.⁴⁹

An historian of the division said that prisoners taken that night claimed a regimental relief was going on when the projector attack came and "they estimated that 2,500 Boches were evacuated."⁵⁰ Nothing has been found in the division records to support this claim, and German records are not available for this period.

The Division Gas Officer said that the retaliatory gassing began at 0315 and lasted something over an hour. Approximately 2,000 green cross shells (phosgene), with a few blue and yellow cross, were put into Seicheprey, Beaumont, and Mandres, and on battery positions below Beaumont and Rambucourt and in the Bois de la Hazelle and Bois du Jury. HE mixed with gas continued to fall on these same areas intermittently through the rest of the day.

49

FO 43, 26th Div, 1622, 13 Jun, set up the projector opn; History of CWS AEF, First Gas Regt, Opns (H - 28, CMLHO); DCR, 26th Div, 18 - 20 Jun. The gas troops may have planned to fire 1,500 drums, as many accts rpt, but less than half that number were actually fired.

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Benwell, p. 81.

There is a suggestion in Captain Cutler's report that the 103rd Infantry was unnerved by this attack. An enemy gas preparation three days earlier for another "Seicheprey," and the fight that followed at Xivray-Marvoisin, had cost the 103rd 28 killed, 167 wounded, and 47 gassed. After the gas shelling on the 19th, 172 men, most of them from the 103rd Infantry, were admitted to the field hospital as gas suspect cases. Only 4 were detained, said Cutler. Many of the others were "undoubtedly malingerers" and deserved severe punishment, although he admitted that a number of the troops at Rambucourt had "certainly breathed in some gas from the unburied, leaking 105-mm. duds from Sunday's bombardment."⁵¹

Some weeks later, as no further missions presented themselves, Company A went off to the Vosges front. Other units of the gas and flame regiment, after training with the British, carried out minor gas operations on other stabilized fronts, but none was to match Company A's exploit. As seems fairly clear, the shoot had been inadequately supported by the division artillery and the severe retaliation dimmed enthusiasm for other missions. It was not, by British standards, a large-scale shoot and was furthermore an isolated effort. Thus, neither certain high casualties nor damage to enemy morale were assured.

51

Rpts of Xivray action, 16 Jun (26th Div Box 47, 33.6); Ltr, DGO to CGO XXXII Fr Corps, 22 Jun, sub: Rpt of Bombardment of Gas Shells (26th Div Box 249, fol 3); Ltr, DGO to CG 26th Div, 22 Jun, sub: Rpt of Gas Atk of Jun 19 (26th Div Box 25, 33.6). Note: The Med Dept record of 120 gassed in the 103rd Inf on 16 - 19 Jun is probably correct.

When the projectors and mortars of the 1st Gas Regiment later took part in operations on active American fronts -- at Chateau Thierry, St. Mihiel, and in the Meuse-Argonne -- the fear of higher commands of the use of gas itself, as well as enemy retaliation, restricted their fire almost entirely to smoke and thermite, and precious little of that. When attached to attacking units, the heavy, unwieldy mortars could not be maneuvered over broken terrain and were soon left far behind the troops they were intended to support. The mortarmen never trained with the infantry they served, and as a result got no helping hand, when better familiarity with the capabilities of the weapon might have got it up forward where it could be used. In World War II the infantry on every front was to learn well the uses of the mortar and in the end appropriated the weapon as its own.

At the end of June 1918 the 26th Division was relieved on the Toul front by the 82nd Division and the French unit it was to train with. On 5 July orders came to relieve the 2nd Division west of Chateau Thierry and on 10 July the 26th took over the line above bloody Belleau Wood.⁵² Eight days later as the French Sixth Army began its counter-offensive against the German Seventh Army in the Marne salient, the 26th Division attacked on the Torcy-Belleau-Bouresches-Vaux front. Over the next eight days the division advanced almost 17 kilometers, to the Forêt de Fère, as the Germans retreated to the line of the Ourcq, capturing 250 prisoners and losing almost 4,500 officers and men, over

⁵² FO 45, 26th Div, 2300, 23 Jun; FO 48, 0400, 5 Jul; FO 50, 1330, 8 Jul.

1,900 of them to gas alone.⁵³ On 25 July the 42nd Division relieved the 26th in the forest.

The division retraced its way back through the sector collecting its stragglers and missing in action. Several days later it continued down to the valley of the Meuse where it received replacements and rested and retrained for almost a month. Here continued the reshuffling of the command that began when on 16 July General Traub of the 51st Brigade left to take command of the 35th Division. Next, wholesale drafts were made on officers and noncoms, the division losing 80 captains and lieutenants in one group alone, to fill out newly arrived divisions or to return and train divisions being formed in the States.⁵⁴ Similar siphoning of the command was going on in other AEF divisions, of course, but General Edwards was highly vocal and seems to have contested every loss in his division as a dilution of its New England Guardsman blood.

"Everything came through as planned"

By late August, according to a division historian, the only people in France who did not know of the coming St. Mihiel offensive were the divisions involved.⁵⁵ On 27 August the 26th Division began moving by stages to the southeast and across the Meuse. On the night of 7 - 8 September it entered the right side of the V Corps line near Rupt-en-

53

Study No. 4, "The 26th Division in the Aisne-Marne Campaign."

54

FO 66, 26th Div, 1730, 29 Jul; Sibley, pp. 243 - 50.

55

Sibley, p. 251.

Woevre, between the 15th Colonial and 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division, the latter in the II Colonial Corps.⁵⁶ The 15th Colonial, with the 26th and 4th Divisions on either side, made up Cameron's V Corps for the attack (Map No. 3). Opposite the 26th Division was the 13th Landwehr.⁵⁷

In the 26th Division sector wooded heights rose from the Meuse in a great undulating ridge for some six or seven kilometers before breaking down into the Woevre plain. Through the woods ran the Grande Tranchee de Calonne, an excellent road leading to Hattonchatel, at the end of the ridge. Directly below Hattonchatel, at the foot of the hill, was Vigneulles, the last of the towns strung along the highway in the plain -- Trezeauvaux, Les Eparges, Combres, Herbeville, Hannonville, Thillot, and Vigneulles. Beyond these towns was another road strung with towns -- Champion, Saulx, and Wadonville -- and beyond them still another -- Riaville, Marcheville, and St. Hilaire. From the ridge on a clear day it was possible to see eighty-two towns in the plain, all in the hands of the Germans.

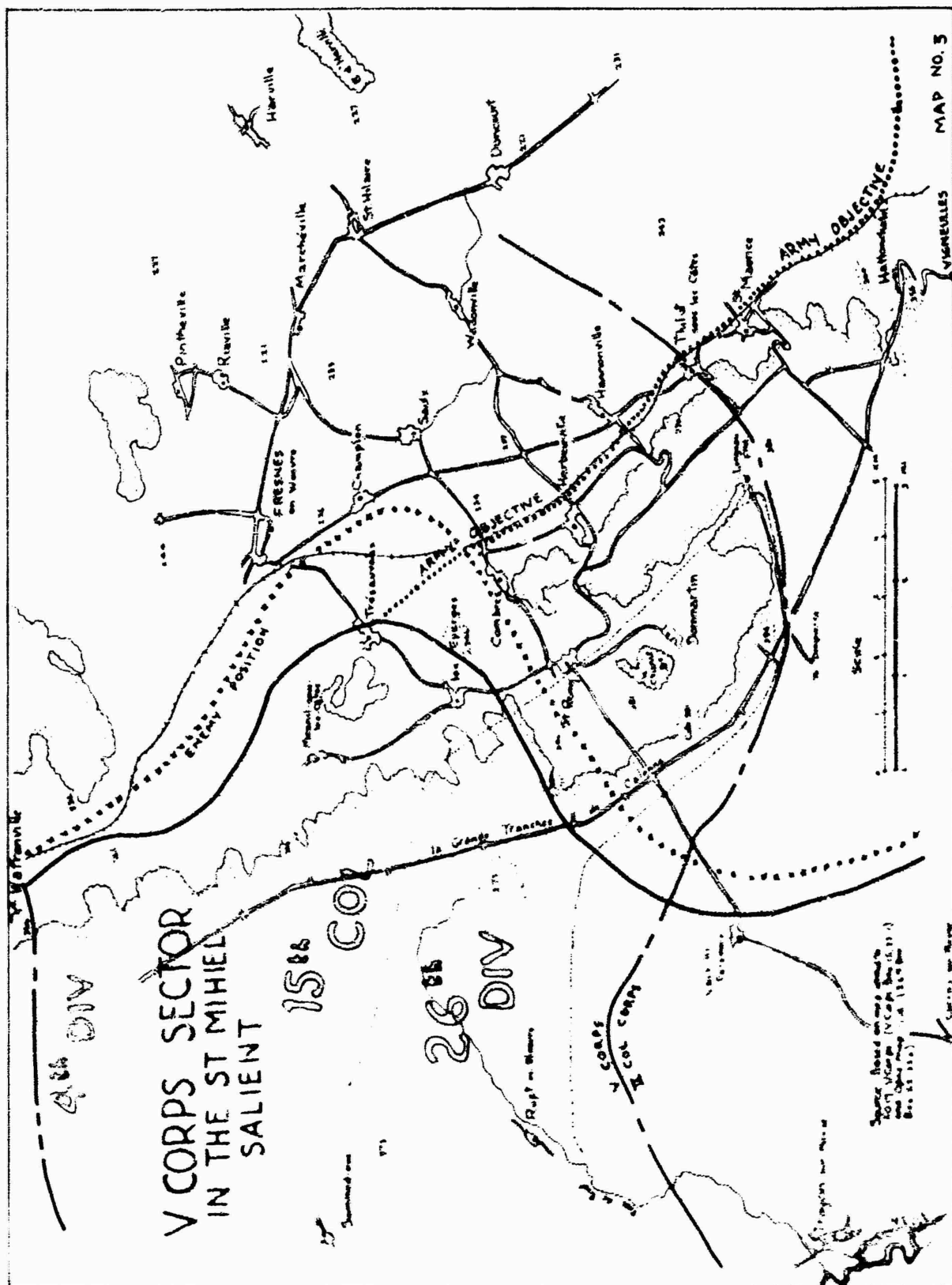
Intricate belts of wire entanglements, kilometers deep, marked the French and German trench systems in the sector, running approximately from Les Eparges down through Vaux les Palameix to Lacrois sur Meuse.

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FO 69 - 76, 26th Div, 27 Aug - 6 Sep.

57

The records of the 13th Ldw in GFB 165 are meagre and useless.



The French held the hills to the north, the Germans the plains and roads to the south. It had been this way for almost four years, and only the suspicions aroused in German intelligence over the past month or so had caused the enemy to begin work on a new fortified line across the top of the salient, the Michel Stellung, along Riaville - Marchéville - Jorville - Hattonville - Dampvitoux east.⁵⁸

Following the 26th Division, great trains of artillery reinforcements crammed into the sector and on rail lines built over the first ridge of the Meuse heights came heavy 14-inch U. S. naval guns. The division had more than two brigades of artillery under its command, including batteries of 220's, 270-mm. howitzers, and 240-mm. trench mortars -- altogether, 42 batteries totaling 252 guns.⁵⁹

In the attack on 12 September to close the St. Mihiel salient, Cameron's V Corps was to take the heights beyond Les Eparges and Combres with the 15th Colonial, the 26th Division assisting in that principal effort. Then the 15th Colonial was to advance to the Longeau Farm - Hannonville road, the 26th Division to Hill 381 - Dommartin and on to a line conforming with the 15th Colonial, marking the First Day's Objective. The 4th Division was to hold fast as corps reserve.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Rpt, A Study of the St. Mihiel Salient, n.d., n. sig. (26th Div Box 12, 25.4).

⁵⁹ Conf held by Col Duncan & Major Jr., CofS 26th Div n.d. (26th Div Box 27, 50.1); Sibley, pp. 260 - 62.

⁶⁰ FO 17, Pt. 1, V Corps, n.d.; FO 17, Pt. 2, 2400, 10 Sep (V Corps Box 14, 32.1); FO 77, 26th Div, 1330, 11 Sep.

In order "to blow the top off Les Eparges [heights] and Combres" by observed daylight fire, Cameron asked that his attack be delayed until 0800, three hours after the main attack began on the south of the salient. Pershing agreed, and the violent artillery preparation succeeded as intended. At 0825 the French were reported over Les Eparges heights.⁶¹

The 26th Division, with the 104th, 103rd, and 101st Infantry in line from north to south, made slow progress through the wired trench system on its front, and within an hour the two attack battalions of the 101st Infantry became thoroughly mixed up. However, by midafternoon the reserve battalion of the 101st, with a battalion of the 102nd, and the 103rd Infantry had crossed the St. Remy-Vaux road, their Intermediate Objective. The 2nd Dismounted, on their right, was then on the Dommartin-Dompierre road. About 1700 hours, the forward elements of the 26th Division came abreast of the 2nd Dismounted on the Dommartin road. The First Day's Objective had been reached.⁶²

⁶¹

FO 18, V Corps, 1900, 11 Sep; Draft Rpt, Opns of 26th Div at St. Mihiel, n.d., n.s. (26th Div Box 25, 33.6). Sibley, p. 265, said that gas was used during the preparation. The only confirmation is Ltr, CG 26th Div to C-in-C 1st Army, 20 Sep, sub: Observations on Opns for Reduction of St. Mihiel Salient (Box 27, 50.1), which states that four sections of the 1st Gas Regt projected gas and smoke just before the atk. If the regt fired any gas it was probably neutralized by the heavy rain that morning.

Ltr, CO 102nd FA to CG 26th Div, 22 Sep, sub: Rpt on Recent Opns (26th Div Box 61, 33.6), said 1,080 [phosgene] shells were scheduled but "it was impossible to get any gas shells. In fact the regt has not recd them to this day."

⁶²

DOR, 26th Div, 12 - 13 Sep (26th Div Box 24, 33.1).

Surprised because caught off balance by the attack that morning, the enemy had fallen back more rapidly than Pershing had thought he would. By noon both corps on the south face were on their First Day's Objective, and by nightfall, despite the delay in moving the troops out again, they were on their way to the Second Day's Objective as the enemy continued to retreat (Map No. 4).

Realizing the situation, at dark Pershing ordered his prize 1st Division, on the left of IV Corps, to disregard alignments and objectives and drive for Vigneulles, then about ten kilometers away. If the 26th Division from the west could link up with the 1st Division in time, the enemy streaming out of the salient with his guns and supplies might be cut off.⁶³

About 1915 hours that night, Cameron, arriving at V Corps headquarters from a visit to 15th Colonial, was told that "General Pershing wishes the salient closed so that no more [enemy] artillery can get away." Cameron called General Edwards at once and is reported to have said: "I want you to select your best infantry regiment, or rather your best infantry colonel and have him march his regiment straight down the Tranchee de Calonne to Hattonchatel."

Colonel Bearss' 102nd Infantry, in reserve, was ordered up and in less than two hours was on the march, with the II Colonial Corps alerted to the passage of the regiment through its lines. At 2230 hours, when

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FO 10, 1st Army, 12 Sep (USA in the WW, [Washington, D.C., 1948] VIII, 258 - 59).

Col. Hugh Drum, Pershing's Chief of Staff, phoned that he wanted the 26th Division unit to link up with the 1st Division in Vigneulles by daylight, Cameron replied that the regiment had long been on its way and should be nearly there. "Everything came through as planned," Cameron later said, "although the 26th was slow, as usual. Even so our troops were in Vigneulles when the 1st Division came up and shelled them, inflicting several casualties."⁶⁴ In what way the 26th was slow was not explained, and no other record of the shelling of the 26th by the 1st Division has been found.

It was a daring maneuver that succeeded. Marching straight down the Tranchee de Calonne, in column formation and flankers out, the 102nd Infantry and its machine gun unit, unopposed, entered Hattonchatel about 0245 and Vigneulles, nine kilometers from its starting point, at 0315 on the morning of the 13th. Some five hours behind the 102nd came the 101st Infantry and two hours later the first accompanying gun with these units.

En route, almost 250 prisoners from the 13th Landwehr were taken,

⁶⁴ Draft Rpt, Opns of the 26th Div at St. Mihiel, n.d., n.s.; CG 26th Div, Rpt of Opns.... St. Mihiel Salinet, 7 Oct; Extract from Statement of Maj Gen Geo. H. Cameron regarding march of 26th Div on night of Sep 12, n.d. (all three in 26th Div Box 25, 33.6).

FO 78, 26th Div, 2300, 12 Sep, had the 51st Brig marching down the Grande Tranchee to Vigneulles, the 52nd Brig over the roads north of the Tranchee to St. Maurice and Hattonchatel, the 51st FA Brig following the 51st Inf Brig, and the 101st MG Bn alone in div reserve back on the Vaux-St. Remy road.

and as the leading elements came into Vigneulles a German wagon train on its way out of town was set upon and captured. Seven hours later (i.e., about 1000) the 1st Division arrived, but by then the bulk of German forces and equipment had escaped through the gap and was safe in the Michel Stellung to the north.⁶⁵

In the two-day operation, G - 3 reported, the 26th Division lost 428 wounded and 158 sick, shell shocked, or exhausted. Thirty-seven officers and 2,193 men of the 13th Landwehr and 35th Austro-Hungarian Divisions were captured. The remnants of the 13th Landwehr remained in the line opposite the 26th for the next ten days, when it was replaced by the 107th Division.⁶⁶

On 13 and 14 September, as the Germans completed their retreat into the Michel Stellung, leaving each town in the plain ablaze as they abandoned it, the 26th Division took over from the 15th Colonial the front from Les Eparges and Combres down to Thillot, putting patrols and then outpost detachments in Wadonville, Saulx, Champlon, and Fresnes-en-Woevre. St. Hilaire was briefly occupied but proved too hot an outpost to hold. The 2nd Dismounted Cavalry took over the adjacent front, from Thillot down to Vigneulles.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Benwell, pp. 140 - 41; Rpts, above; Opns Rpt 16, V Corps, 13 Sep (USA in the WW, VIII, 269).

⁶⁶ DOR, 26th Div, 11 - 14 Sep, 15 - 16 Sep, 23 - 24 Sep (26th Div Box 24, 32.1); SOI 14 - 16, 26th Div, 20 - 23 Sep.

⁶⁷ SOI 6, 26th Div, 12 - 13 Sep (Box 9, 20.1); FO 79, 26th Div, 0130, 14 Sep; DOR, 26th Div, 14 - 17 Sep.

On 16 September Cameron's V Corps headquarters, as well as Liggett's I Corps on the far right, left for the Meuse-Argonne front and the 26th Division in the Watronville-Thillot (Troyon) sector was transferred to Blondlat's II Colonial Corps.⁶⁸ It was to fight in the forgotten battle east of the Meuse.

"How an organization should NOT act
during a gas attack"

The sector taken over at the end of the St. Mihiel operation, said a division historian, was an ideal one, on the crown of a range of hills, with the advanced posts in the towns out in the plain below.⁶⁹ The 26th Division came to doubt it, as did the divisions that succeeded the 26th in the Troyon sector. While the division from the heights dominated the terrain for miles around, the exposed towns in the plain below were ideal targets for enemy gas. Whether the Germans had also found them so under French domination of the heights is not known.

For ten days there was little activity, allied or enemy, as both sides consolidated their positions. The 26th Division made the first move. As a diversion for the Meuse-Argonne attack every division east of the Meuse was ordered to feint with strong forces and pierce the enemy lines, to make him think the main attack was to be launched on Metz. The 26th Division was assigned the enemy towns of Marchéville and Riaville, in the enemy's Michel Stellung. These were to be assaulted

⁶⁸ FO 80, 26th Div, 0145, 16 Sep.

⁶⁹ Benwell, p. 164.

on the morning of 26 September and held for 24 hours.⁷⁰

Synchronized with the fire on the Meuse-Argonne front, the artillery preparation for the diversion began at 2330 on the 25th, but for lack of ammunition was thin by comparison with the thunder on the left. At 0530 hours a battalion each of the 102nd and 103rd Infantry advanced with its rolling barrage, heading into a thick smoke screen put down in front of the two towns. Impeded by morning fog and smoke screen, against enemy artillery in no way intimidated by the thin six-hour bombardment, the assault teams of almost 1,500 men each found the way across the plain costly.⁷¹ Concealed machine guns ripped them apart as they came through the wire and trenches into the towns. Marchéville changed hands four times that day, Riaville at least twice. At nightfall the teams returned to the heights, bringing with them 29 prisoners on the 13th Landwehr and a single captured machine gun. They had lost 50 killed, 268 wounded, and 59 missing.⁷²

That night from 2300 to 0515 hours the 13th Landwehr artillery fired almost 450 large-caliber Lorraine yellow cross shells (mustard gas-HE)

⁷⁰ FO 82, 26th Div, 1400, 25 Sep.

⁷¹ Rpt, Opns O, 51st FA Brig, n.d., sub: Opns of Sep 26 (26th Div Box 59, 33.8), said the small ammo allowance had to be distributed over the whole front so as not to give away the objective.

⁷² DOR, 26th Div, 26 - 27 Sep; Ltr, CO 102nd Inf to CG 26th Div, 28 Sep, sub: Rpt of atk on Marchéville and Riaville; Ltr, CG 26th Div to CG II Col Corps, 29 Sep, sub: Rpt on atk of Sep 26 (26th Div Box 25, 33.6). SOI 19 - 20, 25 - 27 Sep, rpts just 9 prisoners taken.

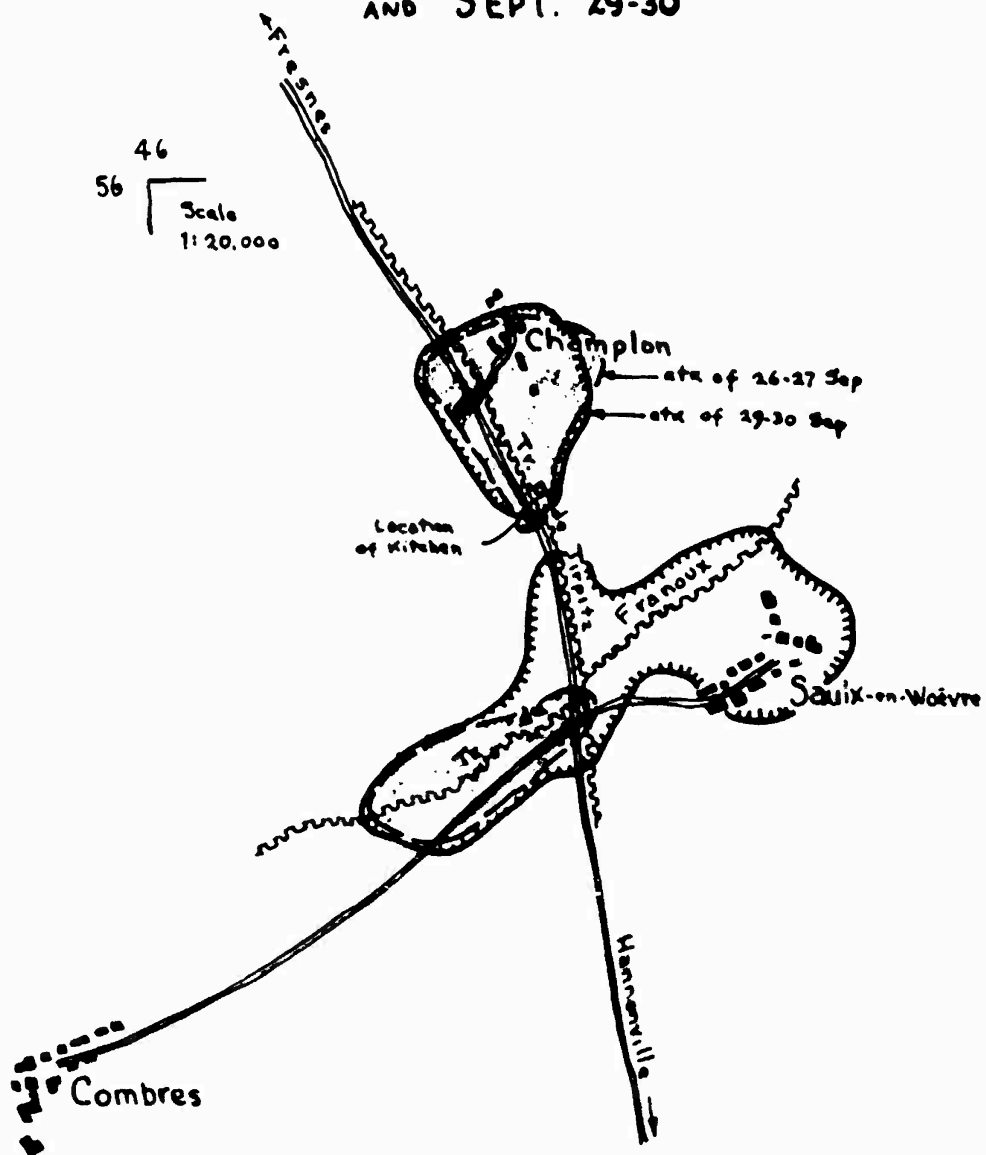
into the Champlon-Saulx sector held by the 3rd Battalion, 103rd Infantry (Map. No. 5). With them were elements of the 102nd Infantry and 103rd MG Battalion that had become separated from their organizations during the raids that morning. Disregarding the most elementary rules of gas discipline, said the Division Gas Officer, these troops demonstrated completely "how an organization should not act during a gas attack."

The gas shells, with their high HE content, had been fired over a six-hour period and the concentration of mustard was therefore light. In some cases the men weren't even ordered to mask, and in others they were allowed to remove their masks within fifteen minutes of the attack. Shortly after the gas shells stopped falling, the Company I kitchen, "in an atmosphere of gas," served breakfast to its men and several platoons of Company M. All the cooks and almost every man they served were later evacuated.

Neither battalion headquarters nor the Regimental Gas Officer were notified until 1300, almost eight hours later, and it was some time after that before the Company M commander and his gas NCOs heard of the attack. The 3rd Battalion had no gas officer, nor did the 2nd Battalion which replaced the 3rd that night.

When the Regimental Gas Officer arrived not one of the officers or men in the area had his mask on, even though the odor of mustard gas was strong everywhere. Although the battalion had been issued lime and had

GAS ATTACKS SEPT. 26-27 AND SEPT. 29-30



Source: Map attached to Ltr. DGO
29 Sep. 1 Oct (26th Div Box 25 334)

Div. Gas Office
26th Div.

MAP NO. 5

had no occasion to use it, none was available. The RGO could only suggest that the troops be evacuated at once from the area and sentries posted around the most heavily contaminated places. Out of the seven platoons of infantrymen withdrawn from the area that evening, 165 men were hospital cases, most of them with face and eye burns. None, apparently, had been wounded by the HE content of the Lorraine cross shells.

Several days later brigade headquarters reported, with considerable chagrin, that it had been informed there had been only 25 gas casualties as a result of the shelling, and had not learned the true figure until the Division Gas Officer report was forwarded to brigade for investigation of the gas discipline.⁷³

Horses were as vulnerable to mustard gas as the men were, and every mustard gas attack on artillery positions was almost certain to result in casualties in the picket line. On the morning of 29 September, approximately 24 105-mm. yellow cross shells fell on a battery position of the 102nd FA a half mile north of St. Remy. Even though the men and horses were removed from the immediate area at once, 4 men in the battery were later evacuated with burns.

Released from the picket line, the horses were led to a nearby hill-top and allowed to graze. Several of the gas shells had burst there un-

73

Ltr, DGO to CG 26th Div, 29 Sep, sub: Rpt of Gas Atk Night Sep 26 - 27, 29 Sep, and atchd inds (26th Div Box 31, 63.3); RGO rpts, n.d. (26th Div Box 248); Spencer, II, 240 - 41.

noticed and it was some hours later before the condition of the horses was observed. Two had such bad mouth, eye, and body burns that they had to be destroyed while the remaining ten had to be evacuated during the next week with severe eye and body burns.⁷⁴

That night, 29 - 30 September, another Lorraine cross bombardment with almost 1,200 shells hit the same areas as two nights earlier. This time elements of the 2nd Battalion, 103rd Infantry, occupied Champlon and almost 300 men of the 102nd Infantry lined the trenches near Saulx. And this time respirators were put on immediately and kept on for two to six hours. As soon as the shelling ceased, the troops were moved out of their dugouts and trenches away from the gassed areas. These measures were further assisted by the fact that a strong wind sprang up just as the shells stopped falling and helped to dilute and dissipate the gas.

The Division Gas Officer, Regimental Gas Officer, and all commanding officers were notified promptly, and as soon as it was daylight the gassed areas were thoroughly decontaminated. That was how an organization should act, wind or no wind. As a result, there were just 7 gas casualties in the 103rd and 19 in the 102nd Infantry, all body burns except for five who removed their masks too soon and suffered slight eye burns. Whether the 2 killed and 7 wounded in the division that day were also casualties of the Lorraine cross shells is not

74

Spencer, II, 242 - 43.

known.⁷⁵

Once more the sector settled down, until 4 October when the division received a special consignment of 1,000 yperite shells (mustard gas) from the French. After a hasty conference with G - 2 it was decided to fire the yperite on a unit of 35th Austro-Hungarian troops believed to be in the Bois d'Harville and another of 13th Landwehr troops in Pintheville.

A battery of 75's was brought down from the heights that night and moved into position northeast of Hannonville. Early on the morning of the 5th, 500 of the yperite shells were put on each of the targets and followed by 180 HE shells, to catch any troops that might come into the open. In the absence of German records it can only be said that German ambulances were seen later that day making repeated trips into the woods and town.⁷⁶

The 26th Division infantry had cleared the sector, making way for the 79th Division, when on the night of 9 - 10 October all the towns from Combres down to Hannonville and the heights above them came under a massive yellow cross bombardment. Almost 200 men in the 79th Division and another 200 in the 26th Division artillery, still in the sector,

⁷⁵

Rpt quoted in Ltr, DGO to C CWS, 20 Nov, sub: Rpt on Recent Opns (26th Div Box 25, 33.6); DOR, 26th Div, 29 - 30 Sep. Rpt, DMGO, 1 Oct (Box 248), said all cases were body burns, none seen with conjunctival or respiratory lesions; they'd kept their masks on.

⁷⁶

Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 7 Oct, sub: Use of Gas against the Enemy (26th Div Box 249, fol 3); DOR, 26th Div, 5 - 6 Oct.

were evacuated the next morning. It was not, as was surmised, in retaliation for the gas on Pintheville but a planned interdiction along the whole German army front, to discourage any intentions of an attack toward Metz.⁷⁷

Gas Exhaustion

The 26th Division went into Army reserve near Verdun on 7 October to rest and refit. Eight days later two battalions of the 104th Infantry were sent to the assistance of Andlauer's 18th French Division in the Bois d'Haumont. In a one-day battle in a sea of mud that cost 14 ~~out of~~ 15 French tanks and a reported 250 officers and men (120 of them to gas), the 104th Infantry made little gain and finally withdrew to its point of departure.⁷⁸

The next day, 16 October, the remaining units of the division came up to reserve positions near Samogneux and Haumont. Late in the day the 102nd Infantry advanced into the Bois de la Reine and Bois d'Ormont, to complete the relief of the 18th French. In the line on the left was the 29th Division, on the right the 26th French. Back of the regiments of the 26th was their own artillery, heavily reenforced with French units,

77

RGO 102nd FA, Rpt on Gas Atk, 9 - 10 Oct (26th Div Box 249, fol 4); Sibley, p. 299; Study No. 19, "The 79th Division at Montfaucon."

78

FO 87, 26th Div, 1230, 6 Oct; FO 90, 2100, 13 Oct; SO 879/3, 18th Fr Div, 1015, 14 Oct (26th Div Box 14, 32.1); DOR, 26th Div, 14 - 15, 17 - 18 Oct, showed 17 killed, 27 wounded in the infantry, 23 wounded in the Engineers that day. See also RGO 104th Inf, Rpt on Gas Atk, 14 - 15 Oct (26th Div Box 249, fol 4); Arko 128 (1st Ldw Div) WD, 15 Oct (GFB 141, fol III); 1st Bn 104th Inf Rpt on action in support of tanks, 16 Oct (26th Div Box 52, 33.6); Sibley, p. 306; Benwell, p. 180.

and across the Meuse several 14-inch naval guns looked for long-range targets. But all this artillery was not to be enough against the massed guns and the gas defense tactics of the 32nd (replaced by the 192nd on 25 October) and 1st Landwehr Divisions, of Maas Group East and Group Beaumont, facing the 26th Division.⁷⁹

The Regimental Gas Officer of the 102nd Infantry was not happy about the coming operation. On the way from Verdun one of his battalions had been shelled with yellow cross, resulting in 47 casualties before they reached their position. The strong smell of mustard gas everywhere in the Ormont sector indicated repeated gassing. It was an unhealthy place to be.⁸⁰

The whole of the sector was under an almost perpetual gas atmosphere, with the French retaliating in kind. If the other American divisions assigned to XXXII French Corps were reluctant to use gas, the 26th Division wasn't, and got small supplies almost daily. Saving up its gas shells, on the morning of 21 October, two days before its attack, the division artillery fired three gas missions totaling 600 No.5 phosgene

79

FO 91, 26th Div, 15 Oct. For disposition of the 26th Div regts, see sketch atchd to SOI 2, 19 - 20 Oct (26th Div Box 10, 20.1); for the formidable concentration of 32nd Div, 1st Ldw, and 15th Div arty (55 btys) between Ecurey and Chaumont, see sketch in GFB 141, fol 1, p. 123. The arrival of additional heavy arty is rptd in 1st Ldw Div Weekly Rpt, 22 Oct (GFB 141, fol IV, p. 73).

80

Ltr, RGO 102nd Inf to DGO, 18 Oct, n.s. (26th Div Box 249, fol 1). DOR, 26th Div (26th Div Box 43, 33.1), rptd 60 gassed on 17 - 18 Oct, 101 on 18 - 19 Oct.

shells on enemy strongpoints in the Bois de Crepion, Ravin de la Hazelle, and Ravin du Chuchu, masking the gas fire with high explosives. A mortar platoon of the 1st Gas Regiment, with the 102nd Infantry in the Bois d'Ormont, put a total of 20 phosgene, 75 white phosphorus, and 41 thermite rounds on enemy positions on Hill 360 that day and the next. And preceding the 45-minute HE preparation for the attack on the morning of the 23rd, the artillery fired another 324 No. 5 shells into the Bois de Crepion and Ravin du Chuchu.

Reporting these artillery gas missions to higher headquarters, Captain Cutler was told that the gas shell had been wasted. The fire pattern had averaged one gas shell for every 37 square meters of target, much too little, and in each case had been put down over a period of an hour, when it should have been known that No. 5 shell had to be fired within two minutes or not at all. The masking HE fire that had accompanied each mission had probably dissipated or destroyed the gas completely.⁸¹ An enemy report was to say the American artillery fire that week was "moderate with some gas shells."⁸²

Captain Cutler's reply has not been found, but it would appear that the artillery, as once before, may have fired gas shell without consulting

81

Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 24 Oct, sub: Use of Arty Gas against the Enemy; Ltr, CGO 1st Army to DGO 26th Div, 25 Oct, sub: Use of Lethal Gas by Arty (26th Div Box 249, fol 3); Atkisson, Rpt of Opns by 1st Gas Ret, 27 Oct (ibid., fol 4); Spencer, II, 249 ff.

82

1st Idw Div, Weekly Rpt, 29 Oct (GFB 141, Fol II, p. 95).

him. It is also apparent that the CWS manuals, "Instructions on the Use of Chemical Shell by Artillery" (January 1918) and "Instructions regarding Use of Gas Shells" (July 1918), had not been consulted, although both had been issued to the division.⁸³

The morale of the division, undermined by months of almost continuous front line duty and little praise for its efforts, was badly jolted when on 22 October General Edwards received unexpected orders relieving him of his command. Under a new AEF policy, it was said, he was to be the first of a number of commanders returned to the States in order to train new divisions. Two days later Brig. Gen. Frank E. Bamford, from the 1st Division, assumed command. Measuring a division's achievements by its losses (Bamford pointed with pride to a mythical 33,000 casualties in the 1st Division), he had allegedly been sent by higher headquarters to promote aggressiveness in the 26th Division.⁸⁴

General Bamford had not yet taken over when on the morning of 23 October two battalions of the 101st Infantry, with the 29th Division on their left, attacked from Molleville ravine. The two divisions, working wholly uphill, had been ordered to clear the heights between Pylon d'Etrayes, Belleu Bois, and Bois de Mcirey, the easternmost ridge of the heights of the Meuse in the sector (Map No. 6).⁸⁵

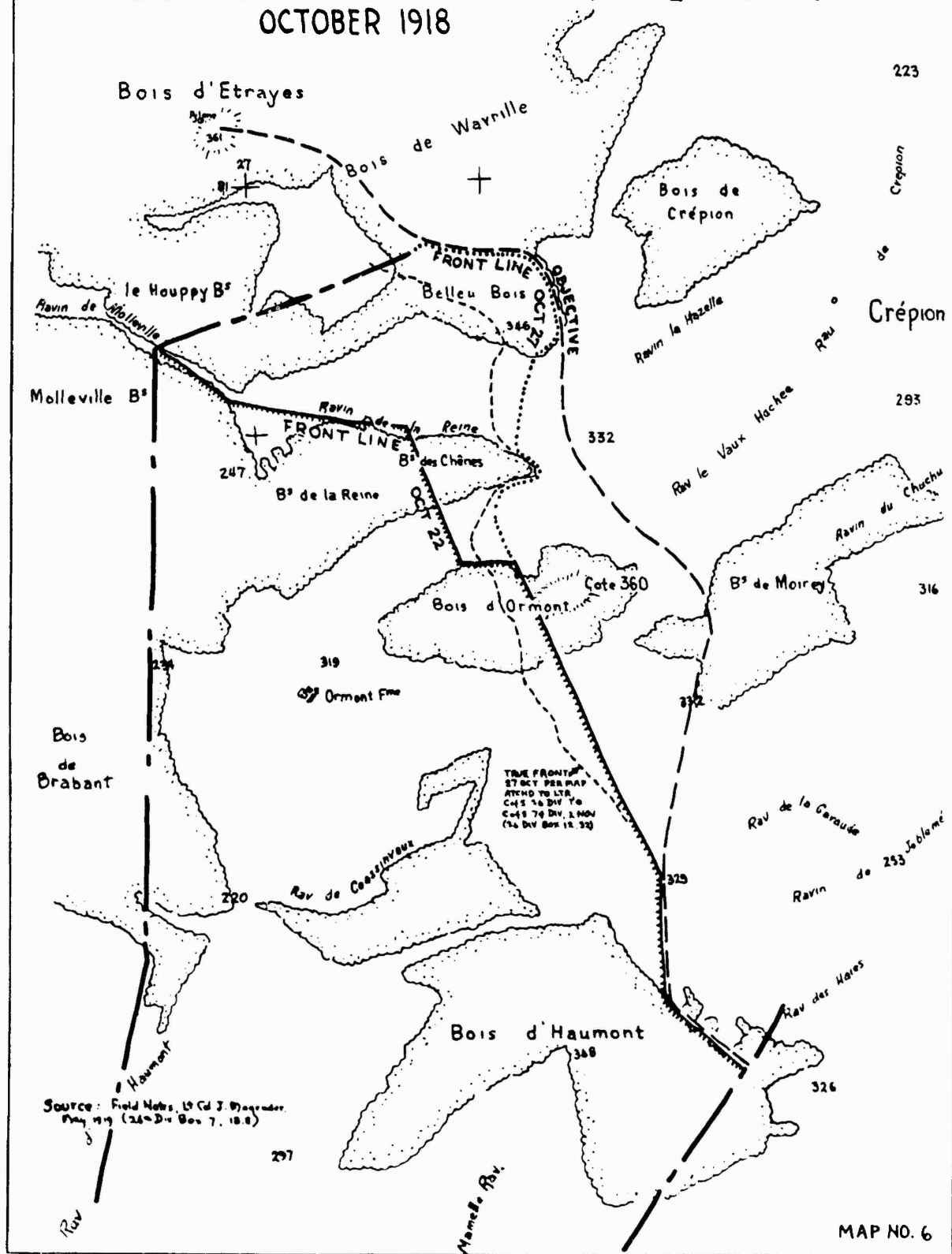
⁸³ Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 14 Sep, sub: Circ ltrs, memos and so forth (26th Div Box 249, fol 3), listed over 70 items recd from the Office of the Chief CWS since 3 Dec 1917, including these manuals.

⁸⁴ Sibley, pp. 75, 308, 323.

⁸⁵ FO 92, 26th Div, 0100, 21 Oct; See Study No. 17 "The 29th Division in the Côtes de Meuse," pp. 43 ff.

26TH DIVISION EAST OF THE MEUSE

OCTOBER 1918



Preceded by a preparation of just 324 gas shells and 30,000 HE shells, converging battalions of the 101st Infantry cleared the Bois des Chênes and Belleu Bois, only to be driven out of Belleu that night by intense artillery and machine gun fire. Advancing south from the Bois des Chênes, the 102nd Infantry was stopped cold on the slopes of Hill 360 in the Bois d'Ormont.⁸⁶ The 52nd Brigade remained in place, protecting the right flank of the division.

Casualties in the 51st Brigade were extremely heavy, G - 3 reported, owing to the deadly machine gun fire of the German defenders on every height and in every wood. Gas attack reports filed every day that week showed almost continual heavy gas fire but few or no casualties at the time of the reports. Nevertheless gas cases arrived in great numbers at the triages and gas hospitals and were soon to exceed by far the machine gun casualties.⁸⁷

On the afternoon of the 24th, with a smoke screen of 800 white phosphorus shells laid to the right of the Bois d'Haumont, a fresh battalion of the 101st Infantry assaulted Belleu Bois again and two battalions of the 102nd returned to the attack on Hill 360. General Bamford saw his

86

FO 93, 1915, 23 Oct; 32nd Div Order Ia 905 and Weekly Rpt 23 Oct (GFB 214, fol 1, pp. 25, 34); Bamford, Rpt of 26th Div, A-M Opn, 23 - 27 Oct, 18 Nov (26th Div Box 25, 33.7), said the bn withdrew from Belleu without orders.

87

DOR, 26th Div, 23 - 24 Oct; Gas Atk Rpts, 21 - 28 Oct (26th Div Box 249, fol 4).

casualties grow without the gain of a yard. Through the next two days, despite repeated artillery preparations and troop reinforcements, the enemy could not be budged. Not until the afternoon of 27 October, following a massive artillery preparation, did the last of 51st Brigade resources and a battalion of the 104th Infantry finally take and hold a wedge in Belleu Bois.⁸⁸ To the south, a merciless enemy bombardment, estimated at 10,000 shells, on the troops at Hill 360 "destroyed or scattered the meager groups who had driven through" to the slope (Map No. 7).⁸⁹

When about noon on 27 October suspected counterattack forces were observed in the ravine above the Bois de Crepion and in the Ravin de Chuchu, the field guns fired a concentration of 520 No. 4 hydrocyanic acid shells, 80 No. 7 chlorpicrin, and 32 No. 5 phosgene into each ravine. There was no counterattack, and prisoners were quoted as saying that 20 deaths and over 100 evacuations resulted from the gas.⁹⁰ Since

88

The remains of the 101st Inf was estimated at 6 officers and 451 rifles. Ltr, Med Off 101st Inf to Div Surg 26th Div, 29 Oct, sub: Prelim rept on atk...on Belleu Bois (26th Div Box 39, 33.6).

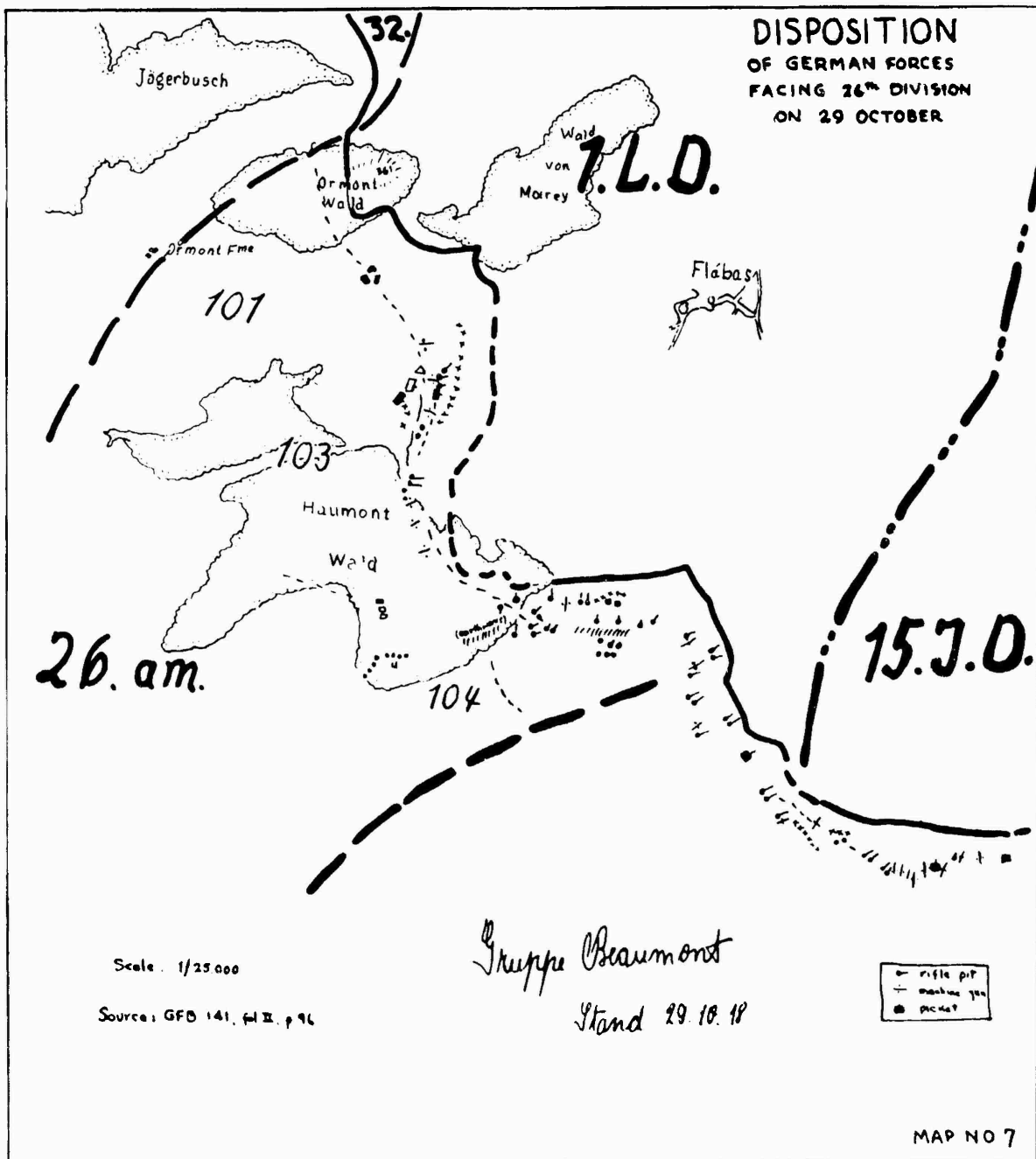
89

Bamford Rpt, 18 Nov, above. See Msgs, 102nd Inf, 27 Oct (26th Div Box 43, 32.16).

90

SOI 10, 26th Div, 27 - 28 Oct (26th Div Box 9, 20.1); Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 28 Oct, sub: Use of Arty Gas against the Enemy (26th Div Box 249, fol 3); Ltr, DGO to C CWS, 20 Nov, sub: Rpt on Recent Opns (26th Div Box 25, 33.6).

Evidence of the odd lots of gas recd by the 26th Div is an undated 101st FA memo, probably written about this time, acknowledging receipt of 61 No. 6 cipalite shells, 450 No. 7 chlorpicrin, 65 No. 8 papite, and 10 No. 12 fraissite shells, all lachrymators (26th Div Box 249, fol 4).



hydrocyanic acid was practically worthless in the field, and the amounts of chlorpicrin and phosgene fired were too small to be effective, it is highly doubtful whether these concentrations stopped anything. An impression of poor results from such use of gas, expressed later by the division artillery commander, was probably more correct:

From interrogation of prisoners it would seem that our gas concentrations were not particularly effective, all the prisoners stating that they much preferred to be under our gas than our shell fire. The ineffectiveness of our gas may have been due to the fact that the enemy had very deep and good dugouts and was subsequently able to protect himself effectively against it.⁹¹

Allowing for the natural preference of the artillery for HE, and doubt about the superior gas proof quality of German dugouts, the conclusion, considering the gas made available to the 26th Division, is valid.

The fighting died down on the afternoon of the 27th and the division remained in place over the next four days. Some seven months later a military observer found the "U. S. line from [Bois d'Ormont] along Bois d'Haumont [clearly marked by the litter of] equipment, including helmets, belts, shelter halves, all kinds of grenades, rifle grenades, rifles, Chauchats, Hotchkiss ammunition, litters, ration boxes, respirators, etc."⁹²

91

Rpt, Col O. W. B. Farr, CO 51st FA Brig, 17 Nov, sub: Rpt of Opns... Oct 15 to Nov 11 (26th Div Box 59, 33.6).

92

Lt Col John Magruder, Field Notes on 26th Div Opns East of Meuse, May 1918 (26th Div Box 7, 18.8).

On 31 October, as the 79th Division arrived to relieve the 104th Infantry in Belleu and Chênes woods and the 101st and 102nd Infantry in the Bois de la Reine, the division counted its losses for those eight days.⁹³ At least 163 were known to be dead, 1,790 wounded, and 515 gassed. Estimating almost 200 missing and presumed captured, there still remained over 1,500 unaccounted for. By 5 November, 649 of the unaccounted for had been located in 29th Division hospitals. The other 850, stragglers for the most part, were back in their organizations.⁹⁴

The scanty records of the three German divisions that faced the 26th that week support the experience recorded by the Yankee Division. The 1st Landwehr Division, entrenched from the Bois d'Ormont south, reported losses of just 140 men. Its field strength on 29 October totaled 148 officers and 1,879 men, manning 112 heavy machine guns and 216 light machine guns.⁹⁵ The 26th Division had attacked a wall of machine guns.

The weather during the second half of October, said the 1st Landwehr, had been very bad, making a morass of the heavy clay earth in the sector and filling dugouts and trenches knee-deep with mud. The successful defense against the 26th Division had raised the morale of the division considerably, but a week later, on 5 November, it had sunk again, owing

94

FO 97, 26th Div, 30 Oct; DOR, 26th Div, 31 Oct - 5 Nov.

95

1st Ldw Div Weekly Rpts, 22 and 29 Oct (GFB 141, fol II, pp. 73, 95).

to reports of the political situation at home, general exhaustion, poor shelter, the tensions of the front line, and particularly "the constant shorts of our own artillery." The German division needed a long period of rest before it could again be useful as a line-holding unit, "preferably in another sector."⁹⁶

In the attack of the 29th and 26th Divisions on 23 - 27 October, one of the three regiments of the 32nd Division reported losses of 36 killed, 78 wounded, and 77 missing, many of the latter presumed left dead or wounded in the woods.⁹⁷ The 192nd Division, replacing the 32nd on 25 October, reported 58 killed, 223 wounded, and 48 missing in the division over the next six days. Like the 1st Landwehr and the 32nd Divisions, the 192nd was virtually a solid machine gun unit, with 114 heavies and 191 lights, manned by 1,670 effectives in its three regiments.⁹⁸ Even this was not enough when under heavy attack, and in the 192nd, as in the 32nd earlier, labor and supply train personnel had been brought up repeatedly to strengthen the units fighting in the line.⁹⁹

96

34th Brig, 1st Ldw Div WD, 31 Oct, 5 Nov (GFB 141, fol II, pp. 55, 107).

97

103rd Regt, 32nd Div WD, 23 - 26 Oct (GFB 184, fol III). Losses for the month, 9 - 26 Oct, totaled 798 in the regt.

98

192nd Div Weekly Rpts, 31 Oct, 6 Nov (GFB 214, fol I, pp. 76 - 7, 115 - 17).

99

32nd Div Weekly Rpt, 23 Oct; 192nd Div Order Ia 7127, 1 Nov (both in GFB 214, fol I, pp. 34, 98 - 9).

Sometime just prior to its relief, the Division Inspector, Col. Horace P. Hobbs, with supporting evidence of the Division Surgeon and Division Psychiatrist, is said to have described the morale of the division as low, the men "shell shy," and in such a state of exhaustion as to be unfit even for defensive operations.¹⁰⁰ General Bamford's vocal opinion of the division did not help morale, nor did his removal of Colonel Logan, the 101st Infantry commander, on 25 October. But the final and utter exhaustion of the division was attributed by the Division Gas Officer to the "marked determination of the enemy to neutralize our activity by means of extensive and almost continuous use of gas." G - 2 agreed, saying that the enemy made "use of all his available resources in order to prevent our breaking through in this sector"-- a circumlocution met before in staff reports meaning the troops had been stopped by gas.¹⁰¹

The succession of winding ravines in the sector, the woods, roads and back areas, "remarkable adapted to the use of gas," said Captain Cutler, had been heavily shelled with blue cross and mustard gas night and day. "Due to the tactical situation and wide areas affected, removal of the troops was not always practical," though the artillery had made frequent temporary evacuations of their positions. "Practically every man in the forward area [was] more or less exposed to gas," and "the long periods of exposure...and wearing the respirator, together with the activity necessary, [wore] the men out, reduced their endurance, and in-

¹⁰⁰ Sibley, p. 325.

¹⁰¹ SOI 9, 25 - 26 Oct.

creased their chances for getting gassed."¹⁰²

On the basis of G - 3 daily reports, Captain Cutler reported division casualties in the period 15 to 31 October as 261 killed, 1,831 wounded, 674 gassed, and 231 missing (cf. p. 55). Among the 674, he was certain, were a number professing to be gassed who hadn't been, or who had "intentionally slightly gassed themselves in order to be evacuated." Cutler's figures are at considerable variance with hospital admission data which show approximately 1,287 wounded and 1,229 gassed in that period, and with the report of Maj. Robert E. DeCeu, Division Medical Gas Officer, who reported 1,332 gas casualties in October, excluding the "considerable number of cases entering the triage with gas diagnosis" but who upon observation proved free of symptoms.

Among these latter were an officer and 95 men with bad cases of "gas fright," who during an advance had "turned back after a brisk bombardment with arsenical shell evidently." Seventy-nine of the group were returned to duty the next day.

Almost all the 1,332 were evacuation cases, with mustard gas effects or respiratory distress from diphenylchloroarsine predominating among their symptoms. Half or more of the evacuees were riflemen who had been

102

Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 5 Nov, sub: Rpt on Gas Casualties in Verdun sector (26th Div Box 249, fol 6); Ltr DGO to C CWS, 20 Nov, sub: Rpt on Recent Opns (26th Div Box 25, 33.6), itemized almost daily gas atks from 17 Sep to 7 Nov, resulting in 1,428 gas casualties and 3 gas deaths.

gassed while sheltering in dugouts or had been in close proximity to bursting gas shells. The remainder for the most part were runners, signal men, members of ration and water details, and litter bearers.¹⁰³

"A new campaign"

When the 79th came in, the 51st Brigade, 26th Division, withdrew slightly, spent several days reorganizing the command, and then swung around to the right of the 52nd Brigade, taking over French positions from the Bois d'Haumont through the Bois des Caures down to Beaumont.¹⁰⁴

Except for reconnaissance patrols and some further light gas fire by the 26th Division artillery, roundly returned, there was little activity until 7 November when word came that the enemy was preparing to withdraw.¹⁰⁵ Evidence of the enemy's intention was the bombardment of the 26th Division front line and battery positions early that morning with an estimated 3,000 yellow cross shells and at least twice as many HE. Regimental gas officers reported the bombardment as four separate attacks, probably resulting in some duplication of the gas shell count, but their report of but

¹⁰³

Ltr, DMGO to Col Gilchrist Med Dir CWS, 23 Nov, sub: Rpt of DMGO 26th Div for Oct and Nov (26th Div Box 246, fol 6); Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 5 Nov, above. Note: Spencer, II, 247 - 51, rpts but three gas atks in the period 21 - 31 Oct, with a total of 13 gas casualties.

¹⁰⁴

FO 98, 26th Div, 1930, 4 Nov.

¹⁰⁵

Ltr, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 7 Nov, sub: Use of Arty Gas against the Enemy (26th Div Box 249, fol 3), said a total of 257 No. 5 and 110 No. 7 tear gas shells were fired on 4 - 5 Nov on three enemy targets, all in one-minute concentrations, followed by HE and shrapnel.

9 casualties, all in the 102nd Field Artillery, was premature and misleading (Map No. 8).¹⁰⁶ The German 15th Division reported firing 2,500 rounds of yellow cross alone on new battery positions it had located south of Mormont Farm.¹⁰⁷

Gas casualties for the period 1 - 6 November, from delayed effects of the gas in the Ormont - Haumont sector and the incessant gassing with green and blue cross by 1st Landwehr Division artillery, were reported by the Division Medical Gas Officer as totaling 342. From 7 to 10 November, Major de Ceu reported an additional 113 gas cases, most of them presumably from the mustard gas fired by the enemy to cover his withdrawal.¹⁰⁸

Patrols on the night of the 7th and the next morning found that the enemy had indeed left the immediate front. In the forenoon his troops in full marching equipment were seen moving east towards Flabas. A general advance was ordered.

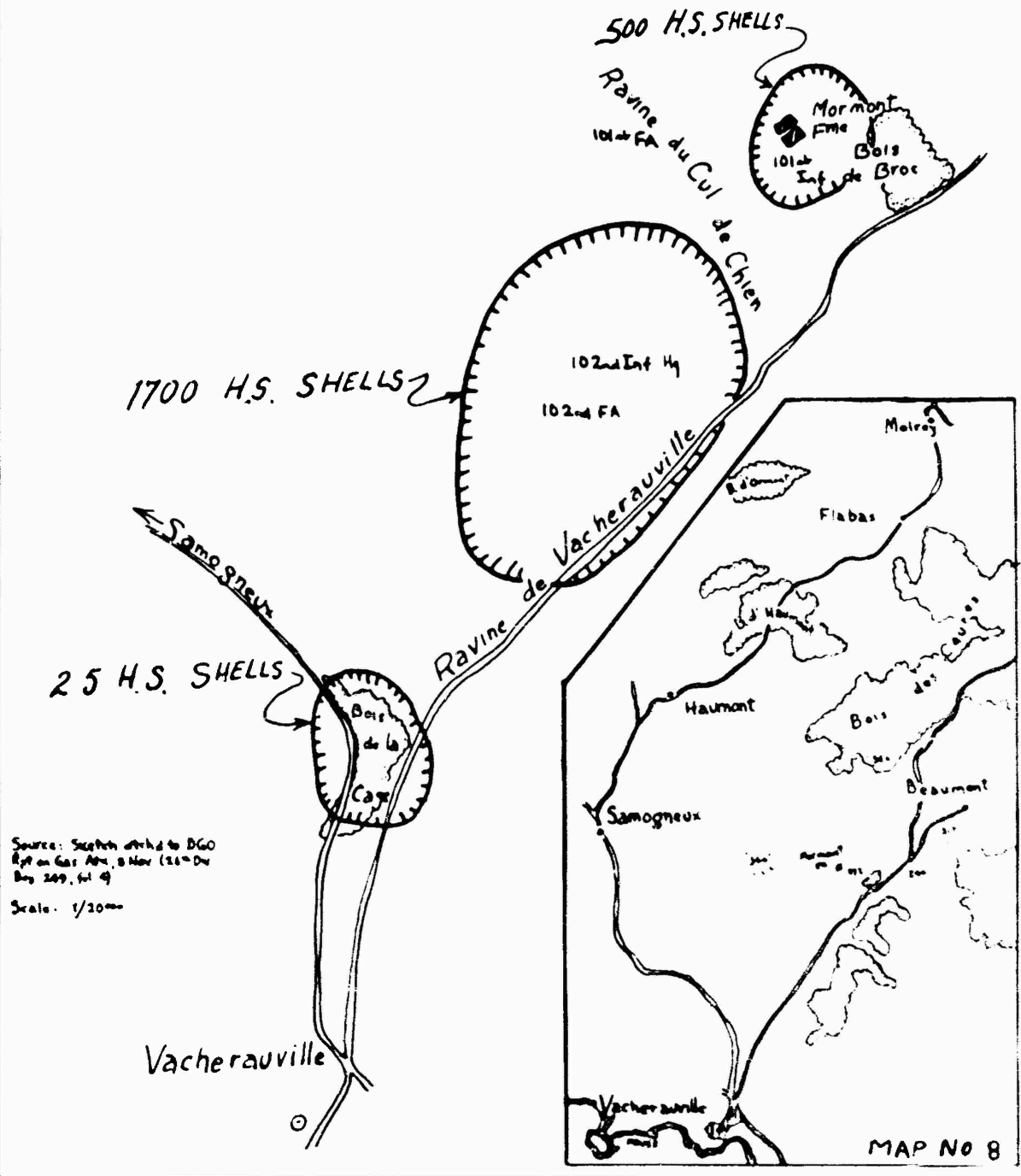
With regiments in line and scouts out front, the division moved out late on the morning of 9 November, with orders "to maintain general

¹⁰⁶ Rpts on Gas Atk, 8 Nov (26th Div Box 249, fol 4); Spencer, II, 252 - 57. SOI 20, 26th Div, 6 - 7 Nov, rptd 1,486 gas shells including 1,000 yellow cross on the artillery. SOI, 102nd Inf, 6 - 7 Nov (26th Div Box 41, 20.7), rptd 1,750 gas shells in its sector.

¹⁰⁷ 15th Div Opns Rpt, 6 - 7 Nov (GFB 167, fol I, p. 113).

¹⁰⁸ Ltr, DMGO to Mad Dir CWS, 23 Nov (26th Div Box 249, fol 6); 1st Ldw Div Orders, 29 and 30 Oct (in 192nd Div records, GFB 214, fol I, pp. 81 - 83); Rpts, 96th Ldw FAR, 1st Ldw Div, 1 - 7 Nov (GFB 141, fol II).

GAS ATTACK - 7 NOVEMBER



pressure and vigorous pursuit of the retreating enemy." But spirits were low, results were meager, and that night was spent in reorganizing the line.¹⁰⁹ As a division historian said, the men were exhausted after fighting for three weeks under continual rain, with scanty food, and little or no shelter. They had been gassed and shelled heavily. And their "regimental and brigade commanders had been sent away, and strangers had been put in their places."¹¹⁰ He referred to the relief of Colonel Logan of the 101st Infantry on 25 October, to the relief of Colonel Hume of the 103rd Infantry on 6 November, and of Brigadier General Cole of the 52nd Brigade on 8 November, the latter two for failing to prevent alleged fraternization with enemy troops in early November. (All three officers were to be exonerated.)¹¹¹

In at least one case, said the division historian, a new commander had the greatest difficulty in getting any response from his men. Not even a thousand replacements that came into the 101st and 102nd Infantry on 8 November could make these regiments effective again, particularly when all knew that an armistice was days or even hours away.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹

FO 100, 26th Div, 7 Nov; FO 103, 1730, 9 Nov; Ltr, CO 101st Inf to CO 51st Brig, 17 Nov, sub: Opns Rpt of 101st Inf, Nov 8 - 11, and atchd docs (26th Div Box 39, 33.6).

¹¹⁰

Sibley, p. 318.

¹¹¹

For fraternization, see Rpt...102nd Inf, 19 Oct (26th Div Box 41, 22.9) and 103rd Inf docs in 26th Div Box 46, 24.9.

¹¹²

Sibley, p. 318.

The stubborn regiment was the 101st, which was reported "shattered" by enemy rearguard action and had to be withdrawn from the line on the night of 10 November. Or as Colonel Hobbs, the Division Inspector made the regimental commander, said, "Straggling was very bad and I was able to muster only 240 men on the firing line from the entire regiment during the operations." The other regiments made better progress that day, reaching the road directly south of Chaumont, in line with the 79th Division, before coming to a halt.¹¹³

The orders of the French corps on the night of 10 November for an advance beyond Ornes were said to have been set forth with "all the earnestness of the beginning of a new campaign."¹¹⁴ But early the next morning the attack was called off, then ordered on again, and sometime after 1040 hours, as both hostile and friendly artillery appeared to be firing at random all the ammunition at their guns, the troops advanced sufficiently to straighten the division front. The casualties that morning were said to have been largely the result of the haphazard fire.¹¹⁵

Casualties during the eleven days of November, while the division patrolled and then followed a retreating enemy, were over 400 killed

¹¹³

Maj Gen Henry C. Hale, CG 26th Div, Rpt of Opns...7 - 11 Nov, 22 Nov (26th Div Box 25, 33.7); Rpt of Col H. P. Hobbs, CO 101st Inf, 27 Nov (26th Div Box 39, 33.6).

¹¹⁴

Sibley, p. 319; FO 105, 26th Div, 2100, 10 Nov.

¹¹⁵

Sibley, p. 340.

and wounded and close to 500 gassed, according to Medical Department data. The Division Medical Gas Officer reported 455 gas casualties that month. The balance were doubtless in adjacent division hospitals.¹¹⁶ Soon after the Armistice the division was relieved by French troops and marched to the rear to begin the long wait. Before Christmas the men who had been captured at Seicheprey and at Trugney that spring and summer were back with the division. In March 1919 the division was homeward bound.

¹¹⁶

Analysis, p. 65; Ltr, DMGO to Med Dir CWS, 23 Nov, sub: Rpt of DMGO 26th Div, months of Oct & Nov (Med Dept Box 3586, fol 25).

ANALYSIS

Battle Casualties

The total casualties of the 26th Division during its 200 days in the line was reported by Ayres in 1919 as 15,168 killed and wounded, the highest recorded for the division. The lowest total, 11,078, but obviously incomplete, was that reported by the Battle Monuments Commission in 1944 (Table No. 1).¹¹⁷

Table No. 1

BATTLE MONUMENTS SUMMARY OF 26th DIVISION CASUALTIES BY ENGAGEMENTS

	Date	Killed	Wounded
Chemin des Dames sector	6 Feb - 20 Mar	(not given)	
Toul sector	31 Mar - 23 Jun	(not given)	
Pas Fini sector	3 - 17 Jul	137	899
Aisne - Marne offensive	18 - 31 Jul	623	3,272
Attached units	21 - 31 Jul	30	119
Rupt sector	5 - 11 Sep	1	33
St. Mihiel offensive	12 - 16 Sep	109	370
Attached units	5 - 16 Sep	0	5
Troyon sector	17 Sep - 9 Oct	139	660
Meuse - Argonne offensive	12 - 31 Oct	729	3,104
Meuse - Argonne offensive	1 - 11 Nov	92	756
		<u>1,860</u>	<u>9,218</u> =
TOTAL		11,078	

¹¹⁷

Ayres, The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary (Washington: GPO, 1919), pp. 115 - 17; 26th Div Sum of Opns (Washington: GPO, 1944), pp. 21, 48, 53.

Between these extreme totals are two sets of figures arrived at by tabulation of data found in Division Adjutant records and in Medical Department statistics (Table No. 2).¹¹⁸

Table No. 2

COMPARISON OF DIVISION ADJUTANT
AND MEDICAL DEPT DATA

Month 1918	Division Adjutant Data				Medical Dept Data		
	Killed	Wounded	Gassed	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Gassed
Jan	—	—	—	—	0	7	1
Feb	13	61	27	11	9	32	12
March	18	52	283	0	5	97	496
April	148	504	250	162	146	328	184
May	67	151	226	57	26	219	465
June	89	259	875	3	63	339	531
July	536	1,879	898	78	527	2,401	1,908
Aug	192	1,167	433	40	5	148	51
Sep	168	705	0	16	151	783	285
Oct	255	813	336	69	504	1,928	1,398
Nov	292	825	0	213	56	356	484
	1,778	6,416	3,328	649	1,492	6,638	5,815
Total casualties exclusive of missing - 11,522					Total casualties - 13,945		

A later report of the Division Personnel Adjutant showed revised total casualties as 1,785 killed, 6,763 wounded, 4,150 gassed, and 645 missing.¹¹⁹ Despite certain discrepancies between Medical Department data

¹¹⁸

Maj. C. A. Stevens, Div Adj, Rpt of Casualties (based on daily casualty telegrams), 24 Dec 1918 (26th Div Box 191, 319.1 Misc); Medical Department of the U.S. Army in the World War, XV, Statistics, Part II, Medical and Casualty Statistics (Washington, D.C., 1925), pp. 1030 ff. Note: Med Dept data covers inf, mg bns, arty, and engineers only.

¹¹⁹

Ltr, DPA to TAG AEF, 8 Mar 1919, sub: Hist of Stat Sec, 26th Div (26th Div Box 5, 11.1).

(particularly in gas casualties) and the events examined in the present study, it is probable that the Medical Department figures are the most accurate available.¹²⁰

Gas Casualties

If General Bamford, who commanded the 26th Division for three weeks, was right about high casualties being the measure of a division's achievements, then the 26th won the gas war in the AEF.

With the records available to him, Spencer recorded 3,112 gas casualties in the 1st Division as the result of 35 gas attacks in the ten months between February and November 1918, and just 1,615 gas cases in the 26th Division as the result of 38 gas attacks in the same period. Both divisions may have undergone almost twice as many gas attacks as Spencer found, and certainly took far more gas casualties than his collection of reports showed.

Official Medical Department statistics reveal the more probable total of 5,815 gas casualties in the 26th Division, 5,676 in the 1st Division, followed by 4,631 in the 28th Division, and 3,894 in the 3rd Division.

One reason for the disparity between Spencer's totals and Medical

¹²⁰

Cf. narrative, pp. 15 - 16, 27.

Department figures was the method of reporting. Division gas officers reported gas attacks on the day they occurred and took no account of delayed casualties, as division medical personnel did. Furthermore, Captain Cutler, like most division gas officers, made a serious effort to minimize the number of gas cases. He saw more malingerers than there really were, and persisted in this attitude despite the testimony of the Division Medical Gas Officer as to the real numbers of gas cases (narrative, p. 58).

Cutler's attitude towards gas and gas casualties seems summed up in a remark he made in one of his reports that he had been with the troops as observer in 30 out of 37 gas attacks in the Toul sector, wearing the respirator under the same conditions as the troops themselves. He felt it was good for the men to see him among them, and it demonstrated that if, with proper precautions, he could outlast gas, so could they.¹²¹ But Captain Cutler's example was not the same thing as being in the area at the moment of the gas attack, or having to prepare for an expected enemy attack while masked.

On the other hand, Cutler appears to have kept singularly complete records (though some are no longer available), and while he seems not to have made full use of them in his summary reports, his Assistant DGO, 1st Lt. K. P. Ribble did. In a post-war account Ribble reported 1,906 gas cases in July, 188 in the last week of September, 1,435 in October

¹²¹

Ltr, DGO to CWS and CGO 1st Army, 25 Nov, sub: Rpt on Gas Opns, Accomplishments, etc. (1st Army Box 340). Cf, Msg, RGO 102nd Inf to DGO, 1800, 26 Sep (26th Div Box 248), reporting 20 mustard gas shells back of Saulx, ended: "You dug out just in time."

(the result of 11,272 gas shells), and 585 in November (the result of 3,742 gas shells).¹²²

The gas experience of the 26th Division, as of the whole AEF, was almost entirely different in the last two months of the war from anything it had experienced earlier. Until October gas attacks were just that -- isolated events in which a unit was hit with a gas concentration and then left in more or less peace to recover from the experience. In the last two months gas warfare began to approximate the pattern of HE fire -- continuous gas shelling punctuated by bombardments to reestablish a high level of effectiveness. And it was then that gas proved its extraordinary superiority over HE in producing mental as well as physical casualties. By then probably every division in the AEF had, through bitter experience, learned as much gas discipline as it was ever going to, but it was simply not enough. As Lieutenant Ribble said, echoing Captain Cutler and other division gas officers in the AEF, "The great number of casualties was caused more by fatigue and reduced morale from being in gas continuously rather than from any lack of gas discipline."¹²³

The experience of October and November is indicated in Table No. 3, which shows the daily gassed and wounded admitted to the division hospitals.¹²⁴

¹²²

Ltr, Ribble, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 20 Jan 1919, sub: Rpt on Gas Activities (1st Army Box 340).

¹²³

Ltr, Ribble, DGO 26th Div to C CWS, 20 Jan 1919, sub: Rpt on Gas Activities (1st Army Box 340).

¹²⁴

Admission lists of 26th Div FH 101 (Med Dept Box 3609), FH 102 (Med Dept Box 3612), FH 104 (Med Dept Box 3617); 29th Div FH 114 (Med Dept Box 2650); 33rd Div FH 132 (Med Dept Box 3714); 79th Div FH 314 (Med Dept Box 3873), FH 315 (Med Dept Box 3875), FH 316 (Med Dept Box 3876).

Table No. 3

26th DIVISION CASUALTIES IN FIELD HOSPITAL LISTS

Date	101st	Inf	102nd	Inf	103rd	Inf	104th	Inf	Other		Total	
	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G
26 Sep	7	0	30	0	7	0	0	0	12	0	56	0
27 Sep	1	1	61	0	35	0	0	0	19	0	116	1
28 Sep	5	3	4	145	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	148
29 Sep	8	2	3	15	4	0	0	0	3	3	18	20
30 Sep	2	0	4	12	5	0	1	0	1	0	13	12
											212	181
1 Oct	0	2	0	18	2	4	0	0	2	0	4	24
2 Oct	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	2	0	3	4
3 Oct	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3	2
4 Oct	1	0	5	2	0	8	1	0	0	0	7	10
5 Oct	0	0	1	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	1	7
6 Oct	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
7 Oct	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
8 Oct	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
9 Oct	0	0	0	22	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	23
10 Oct	0	0	0	28	0	1	0	0	0	73	0	102
11 Oct	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	138	2	141
12 Oct	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	47	0	49
13 Oct	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14 Oct	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
15 Oct	1	0	0	0	0	0	26	134	19	5	46	139
16 Oct	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	6	0	2	21	8
17 Oct	2	1	0	51	1	0	101	12	4	13	108	77
18 Oct	1	1	2	41	3	0	13	6	0	1	19	49
19 Oct	1	0	5	1	4	0	2	5	3	0	15	6
20 Oct	0	0	1	9	0	12	4	2	0	4	5	27
21 Oct	9	0	7	6	2	0	11	2	9	4	38	12
22 Oct	5	2	12	1	0	0	4	0	0	6	21	9
23 Oct	157	38	41	18	5	0	10	10	26	8	239	74
24 Oct	28	58	39	20	3	11	4	15	20	20	89	110
25 Oct	49	58	93	24	4	2	3	12	6	5	155	101
26 Oct	8	25	33	18	11	4	2	2	2	11	56	60
27 Oct	22	22	96	26	20	9	1	7	20	8	159	72
28 Oct	45	21	119	50	16	27	37	31	19	17	236	146
29 Oct	7	14	16	60	3	19	9	31	5	29	40	153
30 Oct	2	10	4	49	0	17	4	14	5	16	15	106
31 Oct	1	11	7	46	9	38	6	7	11	17	34	119
											1,319	1,639
1 Nov	1	8	3	43	5	20	3	8	7	45	19	124
2 Nov	1	0	0	7	0	8	2	8	1	25	4	48
3 Nov	0	3	2	9	2	8	0	10	6	3	10	33
4 Nov	3	0	1	6	13	14	0	10	7	27	24	57
5 Nov	1	0	3	3	1	11	0	1	4	9	9	24
6 Nov	0	1	1	3	1	5	0	2	1	9	3	20
7 Nov	0	2	2	5	9	5	2	5	2	6	15	23
8 Nov	0	0	0	4	0	3	6	2	0	18	6	27
9 Nov	22	3	4	19	24	2	25	6	4	7	79	37
10 Nov	23	2	16	5	36	5	27	3	7	32	109	47
11 Nov	0	0	0	11	0	9	0	6	0	8	0	34
											278	474

Of these casualties, 13 wounded and 495 gassed were found in 29th Division and 79th Division hospital records. No distinction is possible between machine gun and rifle casualties and artillery shell casualties, but it is probable, considering the nature of the fighting on the hills and in the ravines of the sector, that they may be almost equally divided.

These same hospital lists also show 141 exhaustion cases and 103 PN (psychoneurosis) cases between 17 and 31 October but do not distinguish between those suffering from gas or gas mask exhaustion and from shell fire or battle exhaustion. The vile weather during the period and the conditions of combat are represented in the 71 trench foot cases admitted in that same period.

Of interest is the wide disparity between gas casualty counts for October and November. The Division Adjutant found 336, the Medical Department shows 1,882 (Table No. 2). Lieutenant Ribble reported 2,020 (narrative, p. 68), and hospital records show 2,113 (Table No. 3).

G - 2 and DGO data found in the narrative give no clue to the probable number of gas shells fired by the enemy in October and November, and Ribble's count of 15,014 for those two months must suffice. On the basis of his total of 2,020 gas cases, 7.4 gas shells were required for each casualty. Accepting the Medical Department total of 1,882, 8 gas shells were necessary to produce a casualty.

Lessons Learned

The rivalry between the 1st and 26th Divisions, implicit when it is not made explicit in the records, began with the original plan to have these two divisions form the first American Army corps in France. It was perhaps inevitable that the National Guard division could not stand the comparison. Baiting the division began when it relieved the 1st Division in the Toul sector on 1 April. 1st Division complained to higher headquarters that the 26th made a mess of the relief, and the suspicion of incompetence planted then became rooted with the Seicheprey affair.

It is possible, as General Edwards said of the Toul front, that the French insisted on large forces being maintained in the outposts (narrative, p. 10), even when a bombardment warned of a coming raid or attack. The Germans long before that had learned to withdraw the bulk of their outpost forces before an attack, but the French did not learn to do it until July.

Unlike the 1st Division, the 26th obeyed French orders. And as late as September, still under French orders, the 26th Division again occupied in force an outpost zone, out in the Woivre plain of the Troyon sector, and suffered for it. Other divisions learned to circumvent French orders, but not the 26th.

The gas bombardment preceding the Seicheprey raid created havoc, as it was intended to, if not high casualties. It was the same kind, if not degree, of preparation used by the Germans in their March attack

against the British, and the 26th Division knew the pattern, for they had had some slight training in defense against it.¹²⁵ But gas training in the 26th seems to have been sketchy, and gas discipline remained a recurring problem at least until September. As in other divisions, the problem was aggravated by the high turnover of personnel and the constant influx of raw replacements who had little or no gas training and invariably seem to have arrived without gas masks.

Given these circumstances, the lesson of gas discipline was a difficult one to learn. If men instinctively hit the dirt or took shelter when the first shell of a bombardment fell nearby, these actions were of little use when it was a gas shell.

The disastrous gassing of Lahayville a month later, for the raid near Richecourt (narrative, pp. 19 - 25), might have been avoided had the division artillery commander consulted the Division Gas Officer. Whether this lesson was learned is not certain, for in October (narrative, pp. 47 - 9) the division artillery fired several missions with non-persistent gas in a manner almost guaranteed to render the gas harmless. Since the Division Gas Officer reported this fire without comment, and said nothing about whether or not he had been consulted, it is possible that he himself may not have been aware of the misuse of the gas shells.

¹²⁵

See docs in 26th Div Box 11, 20.9.

The distinction that the 26th Division holds in CWS records, of having the largest gas shoot by the 1st Gas Regiment fired on its front (narrative, p. 27 - 8), is diminished by the consequences of the enemy retaliation, when the division artillery failed to support the shoot adequately. It was one of the first independent shoots of the gas regiment, and probably because of the violent reaction of the enemy, the last. Yet no one was to suggest that greater cooperation and coordination should have existed between the gas troops, the infantry, and the artillery. The English and Germans learned to use their gas troops with conspicuous success, and the AEF might have as well had the war continued into 1919.

The gas experience of the AEF during the last two months of the war, discussed in the previous section, pointed up a lesson and problem that was never faced. Troops might be chewed out or even threatened with court-martial for gas discipline infractions during a specific gas attack, but officers and men alike were helplessly vulnerable under prolonged or continuous gassing. A new and more comfortable mask was on its way as the Armistice was signed, but it is doubtful whether even this would have provided protection against heavy gassing over a period of two or more days and nights in a row, or ^{for} a week in a gas atmosphere.

It is likely that had the war continued, time would have been found for further training in wearing the mask for long periods of time under combat conditions, and more frequent reliefs of companies and battalions would have been the rule rather than the exception.